

Chapter 1: Goodbye

Severus watched his son finish preparing the runic inscriptions on the floor of the Headmistress' office. He knew that this might be the last time he ever saw him again. Pushing his own distress aside, he quickly hurried over to Minerva, who lay on a tartan covered couch, for time was now of the essence.

"You understand what will happen if this succeeds?" Severus asked urgently.

No longer able to speak, Minerva just nodded and grasped Severus' hand. She quickly squeezed it in both a confirmatory and comforting gesture. After sparing her a smile, he turned to his son, who stood at the edge of the runic circle he had just finished drawing.

"Father, you are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I...". His son's voice trailed off, too choked up to continue.

Severus just pulled the boy into a hug and felt as if he didn't ever want to let him go. A yell from outside the door alerted them all to the fact that the time to try the experiment was finally upon them.

His son stepped quickly into the circle, drew his wand and began the incantation. Just as he spoke the final word, Voldemort broke through the last ward on the door and entered the room. His son vanished, and Voldemort let out a scream of frustration. He had little time to do more than that, because the magical backlash from the experiment spread out like a tidal wave, and in little more than a few seconds, everything with a two mile radius of Hogwarts was laid to waste.

Severus' final thought was "we did it" before the darkness took him.

His son's first thought after the transfer was "Oh shit" as a bolt of green light headed towards the baby sitting in front of him. Still disorientated, he stumbled forward, tripped and fell into the green light.

Chapter 2 - The Sorting

Harry found an empty compartment in the middle of the train. His father had placed a featherweight charm on his school trunk to make it easier for him to lift it onto the train. Hearing a scuffling noise behind him, Harry looked backwards. He was relieved to see it was only his brother. Both boys had been filled in by their father as to what to expect during the train ride, but not on what was going to happen once they reached Hogwarts after the trip across the lake. No matter how hard they had begged, their father had refused to tell them how they would be sorted.

The train pulled out of the station on time and soon gathered speed as it headed up the tracks towards Scotland and Hogwarts. With no interruptions, except from a bushy haired girl looking for a toad, and the trolley witch, the journey was soon over for the boys. Both were excited and nervous as to what would happen next. Just as they had been told by their father, they were met by a giant of a man, who turned out to be Rubeus Hagrid, the groundskeeper for Hogwarts.

After an uneventful journey across the lake, where they shared a boat with the bushy haired girl and a plump dark-haired boy, they found themselves disembarking under the stare of a rather stern looking teacher. They knew this to be Professor McGonagall, Head of Gryffindor and the transfiguration teacher at Hogwarts, who proceeded to give them a lecture about Hogwarts and what was expected of them. She then left them to check to see how things were going in the Great Hall.

The minute she left the anteroom, whispers immediately sprung up about the Boy Who Lived coming to Hogwarts. Harry, being of a sensible disposition, just ignored the whispers and rolled his eyes at his brother. The discourse was soon interrupted by McGonagall returning. She then proceeded to lead the group of first years into the Great Hall. Harry could hear the bushy haired girl lecturing about how she had read about the Great Hall and its environs in Hogwarts: A History. As they approached the head table, Harry noticed a three legged stool atop of which sat a rather battered hat. To say he was surprised when a rip in the hat appeared and began to sing was an understatement.

Once the hat had finished its ditty, McGonagall began by calling out the names of the names of the students in alphabetical order. Harry fidgeted for a while until she finally reached his brother. He listened intently trying to figure out what the hat was doing, when it's rip suddenly opened and it yelled out "Ravenclaw". Based on what they knew about the houses, both Harry and his brother had expected him to go Hufflepuff or Gryffindor. Harry clapped hard for his brother, and then suddenly it was his turn. Harry climbed up onto the stool and placed the hat on his head.

"Hmm, well what do we have here? the hat drawled into Harry's ear. "I think you would do well in any house except Slytherin. You lack the ambition and drive needed to do well in that house."

Harry's heart was racing and felt as if it would jump out of his chest. He was really relieved when the hat rejected Slytherin for him but now it had to pick where to put him.

"You'd do well in Hufflepuff – you are loyal and hardworking but you are also very clever and would do well in Ravenclaw. You are also not lacking in bravery, so Gryffindor would serve you well, but as you seem to have a tendency to think things out, I think to be sure, it had better be RAVENCLAW."

Harry quickly jumped off the stool and ran to sit down beside his brother and to receive the best wishes of his new housemates. A few more names went by until McGonagall called "Potter, James" and the entire Great Hall erupted into a cacophony of sound. Dumbledore, headmaster of the school, soon brought the noise to an end. Jamie Potter, the Boy Who Lived, hurried to climb onto the stool. He had barely put the hat upon his head when the hat called out "Gryffindor". Harry's only thought was that he was glad he hadn't been put in the same house as Jamie Potter and quickly turned to his brother. The feast was soon over and Harry and his classmates were soon ensconced in Ravenclaw Tower.

Harry turned to his brother and asked if he wished to give a letter to Hedwig, his snowy white owl, who had been a gift from his parents on getting his Hogwarts letter, to take to their parents. His brother had

opted for a cat which he called Coalblack, on account of its color. After his brother had written a letter, and he had attached both of them to his owl, Harry opened the window to let Hedwig out.

Harry then quickly climbed into bed.

“Night, Harry” his brother managed to drawl, before settling into sleep.

With a mumbled “Night, Dudley”, Harry rolled over and went to sleep.

Chapter 3 - First Day

The next day dawned bright and early for Harry. He had been up most of the night unable to sleep after a particularly bad nightmare. His parents had done their best to comfort him when he was little but no-one could work out why a two year old had vivid dreams of death and destruction. The nightmares hadn't lessened in any way as he got older but he was better able to deal with their aftermath. The nightmares never differed; he was always standing on a field unable to move and unable to make out the features of anyone around him. He would just be rooted to the spot, helpless as he watched figure after figure fall to the ground. The dreamscape would then change and he would be standing in a circle reaching out for a figure who was always just out of reach. As his vision faded to black he would wake up. Trying to throw off the feeling of loss, he inevitably experienced upon waking, he knew that he would be unable to fall back to sleep, so he decided to get up and go for a shower.

While showering, Harry contemplated yesterday's sorting. He hadn't expected Dudley to get into Ravenclaw. He would have to ask Dudley what the hat had said to him. Harry couldn't help but be pleased that Dudley had made Ravenclaw as he regarded Dudley as his best friend and brother, even though he wasn't his brother by birth. They had lived together since they were two, when something had happened to Harry's birth parents. Dudley's mom had taken Harry in and raised him as if he had been her own son, and Harry now regarded her as his mother. When she had remarried, her new husband had adopted both boys. As well as Dudley, Harry now had three more siblings, Aurilia, Georgiana and Scarlet-Rose, whom he adored. All three had cried when he and Dudley had left for school. Their mother hadn't been much better. Thankfully his Dad had taken them both to the train station to catch the train.

Harry's thoughts then turned to his other year mates. One of the most prominent figures in his year was Draco Black, heir to the Black fortune, and one of the richest children at the school. Draco Black was the son of Lucius Malfoy but had taken his mother's surname when she had discovered that Lucius had been a deatheater, and had been present at the potential slaying of the Boy Who Lived. Narcissa, coming from a superior bloodline to Lucius, had promptly

divorced him, removed Draco from his aegis, and then changed Draco's name from Draco Lucius Malfoy to Draco Sirius Black, after his uncle and Head of the Black Family. Narcissa and Draco now resided at Black Towers, the dowager residence on the Black Estate. After the divorce, Lucius Malfoy married Petronella Parkinson, a pureblood witch who had since presented him with four children, the most important of which was his new son and heir, Matthias Malfoy. With Draco no longer being the heir to the Malfoy fortune, Sirius, having no sons of his own at the time, had made Draco heir to the Black fortune.

Harry had expected the hat to place Draco in Ravenclaw, and he hadn't been disappointed. Harry was aware of Draco's background because his father had made sure he knew as much about the wizarding world as possible so that he would not be at a disadvantage when he started at Hogwarts. Harry's parents had generally kept the children away from the wizarding world, and so Harry's exposure had mainly been to his father's teachings and the Daily Prophet.

When it came to the wizarding world's most famous hero, he wasn't surprised to see Jamie Potter go into Gryffindor. Jamie Potter was generally adored by most of the wizarding world; he had defeated Voldemort when he was just a baby. No-one knew how Jamie had managed to defeat Voldemort that day, but when Dumbledore had arrived with Hagrid at the Potters' cottage, they had found Lily Potter unconscious near the entry to the cottage. Jamie Potter had been lying on a baby blanket in his nursery with his father's body lying directly in front of him. James Potter looked as if he had been hit with the Avada Kedavra curse. On examination it had been discovered that Jamie had been marked with a lightening bolt scar on his forehead. All that remained of Voldemort was his smoldering robes lying on the floor about ten feet away from Jamie. However, an intensive search had failed to locate Voldemort's wand.

Rumors had, of course, sprung up about the attack, the main one being that Jamie had had a twin brother, but that he had died along with his father in the attack. As the Potters had been under the Fidelius charm since before Jamie's birth, no-one knew exactly what had gone on, just that the wards had fallen, and James Potter had

apparently given up his life in an effort to save his son. Lily Potter had remained in a coma for several months but once she had regained consciousness, she had taken her son and moved into Potter Place, the ancestral home of the Potters. The wizarding world had been shocked when, barely six months after her husband's death, Lily had remarried, and had relocated to her new husband's home. By the time Jamie had turned six, Lily had provided him with a brother and two sisters.

Harry's thoughts were rudely interrupted by another of his year mates, Terry Boot, entering the shower rooms. Barely sparing Harry a grunt, Terry quickly climbed into a shower cubicle and shut the privacy curtain. Harry left Terry to his ablutions and returned to the dormitory where all the other boys were still sleeping. Harry quickly dressed and decided to head to the Great Hall.

On arriving at the Great Hall, after getting lost a couple of times, Harry spotted the bushy haired girl who had droned on about Hogwarts before the sorting. She had been like an encyclopedia and he had expected her to join him in Ravenclaw, but he hadn't been particularly surprised when she was placed in Slytherin. Apparently most children were usually placed in the same house as one of their parents, and for Hermione Snape, this was no exception. He just hoped that she wouldn't be as unpleasant as he had heard her father could be. She presently had her head buried in a book whilst she ate her breakfast.

Feeling hungry Harry headed for the Ravenclaw table which, for the time of morning, seemed to be surprisingly full when compared to the other houses in the school. Taking a seat next to a red-headed boy, Harry sat down and began to fill his plate with the makings of a full English breakfast. Just as he was about to tuck into his meal the redhead to his left turned into a canary. After thirty seconds, and a few chirping sounds, the redhead resumed his original appearance. Noticing Harry's stare, the redhead held out his hand

"Hi, I'm George Weasley. Sorry, but that was my brother's idea of fun."

Harry thought that George didn't actually look sorry but he shook hands and introduced himself. He knew that the Weasleys were a pureblood family. Harry also knew that George and Fred had surprised their family by being the first Weasleys not to make Gryffindor in eight generations. What had been more shocking was that while George had made Ravenclaw, his brother Fred had been sorted into Slytherin. Both boys had made a scene about not being in the same house but the Sorting Hat had remained firm; the boys had to go into the houses it had allocated for them. What had annoyed George was the fact that the hat had thought Fred more sneaky and ambitious than he was.

Harry tried to return his attention back to his breakfast, only to have his concentration broken once again, this time by a loud whispering which could only mean one thing, Jamie Potter had come down to breakfast. Looking over to the Gryffindor table, Harry watched Jamie sit down with two boys from his year, Neville Longbottom, and Ronald Prewett.

Harry knew that Neville lived with his mother and grandmother, as Harry had visited on an almost daily basis to attend lessons with Neville. Neville's father had been tortured to death by death eaters after being captured just before Voldemort had been vanquished. Being somewhat protective of Neville, his mother had not wanted Neville to attend a regular school, so Neville, together with Harry, Dudley and Neville's sister, Seville, had all been homeschooled by a tutor. Even though the tutor had been teaching Neville and Seville on a full-time basis, Harry and Dudley had only attended classes at weekends for wand lessons and wizarding etiquette. The rest of the time they had attended a local muggle school. Harry liked Neville and was pleased when Neville made it into Gryffindor.

Watching Jamie's other apparent friend, Ronald, Harry was glad he hadn't made it into the same house. Ronald, for all intents and purposes, resembled a man who hadn't been fed for a week, and was filling his plate and his mouth at a speed that Harry felt needed to be seen to be believed. Thankfully George's habits didn't match Ronald's.

George and Ronald's parents had divorced just after their mother had given birth to the first girl in the Weasley family for quite some time. All those that knew the Weasleys had been shocked. As far as they had known, Molly and Arthur had been devoted to each other. After the divorce, which was unusual in the wizarding world, Molly had taken Percy, Ronald and Ginny whilst Bill, Charlie, George and Fred had stayed with their father.

Molly Prewett had then come into quite a substantial amount of money from the muggle side of her family when her accountant cousin and his entire family were wiped out in a mysterious car crash. Even after the inheritance and their mother's pleas, none of the boys who lived with Arthur wished to move in with her. Molly therefore brought up Percy, Ron and Ginny as moderately wealthy purebloods. However, rumors abounded that Molly had orchestrated the car crash in order to get her hands on the money.

Arthur decided that he liked being married and proved this by getting married again after two years of the bachelor life. His new wife, Andromeda Tonks, was a widow who had a young daughter, Nymphadora. Arthur subsequently adopted Nymphadora, or Nym, as she was nicknamed by the boys. Another Weasley, Arthur Edward, made his way onto the scene a few years after Arthur's remarriage.

Harry's musings abruptly came to an end when a bell rang signaling the end of breakfast and the start of the school day. He hadn't even noticed Dudley and the rest of his year mates join him at the table. Looking down at the table, he noticed his timetable sitting in front of him. Quickly scanning it he noted that he had transfiguration, lunch, and then, joy of joys, potions.

Harry decided that he quite liked transfiguration. McGonagall seemed strict but fair, and she had impressed the class by turning her desk into a cow and then back again. Apparently she did the same for Gryffindor later that day except the desk became a pig, not a cow. Draco Black had managed to gain 5 marks for managing to achieve the assigned task for the day. Harry felt that his day was going well until he and Dudley stepped into the potions classroom.

The class was held with the Slytherins. After many years of animosity between the Slytherins and the Gryffindors, to say nothing of the countless potion incidents, Dumbledore had decided that it might be a good idea to split these groups up for the volatile lesson of potions. He had therefore decided to team the Slytherins up with the Ravenclaws.

Harry had the sinking feeling that things were going to go badly as soon as Snape had entered the room, his robe flying out behind him. Snape then went through what Harry decided was probably the standard spiel at the start of the year for new students. Harry wasn't exactly taken aback when Snape, after taking the register, turned to the class and looked directly at him. He had the feeling that Snape wasn't his number one fan. Snape opened his mouth and continued to look at Harry.

"Let's see what you dunderheads are made of. What do you get when you mix asphodel and wormwood together?"

On glancing around the classroom, Harry could see most of the Ravenclaws with their hands up, as was Hermione for Slytherin.

"You there" snarled Snape, pointing directly at Harry, "I don't see your hand in the air."

As Harry furiously tried to remember what he had read that morning, Snape once again snapped at him "I think we might like to get a little further today than the first question."

Turning away from Harry, Snape directed the same question to Hermione. On receiving the correct answer, he promptly awarded Slytherin 10 points.

Harry once again felt the weight of Snape's stare, and he looked up to find Snape's comments were again being directed his way.

"I suggest you actually open a book before you come to class next time, Lupin, and try to live up to the Ravenclaw reputation."

Chapter 4 – Back Home

Nia Lupin jumped slightly as something tapped on her window. She immediately recognized Hedwig, Harry's snowy white owl. As soon as Nia opened the window, Hedwig flew in and landed on her shoulder, gently nibbling on Nia's ear. Nia took the letters from Hedwig's outstretched leg. She was desperate to see what the boys had written but she had promised Remus that she would wait for him to arrive home from work, and for the girls to return from school. After checking the time, she sat down and poured herself a cup of tea. She let her mind drift off into the past. She still found it difficult to believe how differently her life had turned out than she had been planning since she left school.

9 years ago

A knock at the door startled Petunia Dursley. She hastened to answer it, not wanting the sound to disturb her sleeping husband. On the doorstep stood a man with a long white beard who was clothed in the strangest garb. Immediately realizing what he was, she immediately ushered him into her front room. She didn't want her neighbors gossiping about strange individuals visiting the Dursley household. Sparing no time for real pleasantries, the strange looking man immediately launched into the reason why he had come to see her.

"My name is Albus Dumbledore, and, yes, as you have already guessed, I am a wizard. Perhaps you had better sit down. I have grave news."

Without meaning to, Petunia immediately sank into the nearest chair. Her legs started trembling. Grave news could only mean one thing, something had happened to her sister, Lily. Her misgivings were immediately confirmed by Albus Dumbledore.

"I think I had better start by saying that your sister was recently badly injured, but she is expected to make a full recovery."

Petunia couldn't stop the tears that came to eyes on hearing the news. Relief was quickly followed by anger after Dumbledore's next words.

“She was attacked by a wizard feared by our kind. Voldemort is, or should I say was, a dark lord who, until recently, terrorized the wizarding world on a regular basis. Unfortunately your sister was hurt defending her home, and her husband, James, was killed.”

Now Petunia's tears began in earnest. Even though she had not been fond of James Potter, she knew her sister would be heartbroken at her husband's death. Even though her sister had gone into hiding some time ago, Petunia had been delighted to receive a letter from Lily telling her how excited she and James were about the birth of the two boys. A thought then struck Petunia.

“What about the babies? Are they okay?”

Time seemed to stretch out forever while she waited for Dumbledore's response.

“Both boys survived the attack. However, Jamie sustained some serious injuries, some from Voldemort, and some, I believe, from falling masonry in his bedroom. Harry, however, appears to be doing fine. Jamie is currently being taken care of at St Mungos Hospital where he is being kept with his mother. It is Harry who I am concerned about though.”

“Why, what's wrong with Harry?”

“Nothing is wrong with him, but in the case of accident or death, James and Lily had stated that their friends Alice and Frank Longbottom should take care of Harry. Unfortunately, Frank died a few weeks ago, and Alice is in St. Mungo's herself, giving birth.”

Despite her dislike of the wizarding world, Petunia felt her heart go out to Alice Longbottom. To have lost her husband when she was about to give birth must have been devastating. A thought occurred to Petunia.

“What about Harry's godfather?”

“Sadly Remus is unable to take care of Harry at this time. He has health issues which preempt him from taking custody of Harry. That is why I have come to you.”

“You mean you want me to take Harry?”

“You are his aunt. Who better?”

Petunia shifted nervously in her seat. If she disliked the wizarding world, then her husband, Vernon, was even worse. He hated anything to do with the wizarding world. It had been he who had made Petunia choose between her sister and her marriage. Having lived all her life with her parents, and then with Vernon after they married, she had panicked. She would not have been able to take care of herself if she was on her own. She had regretfully picked her marriage. It was a choice she had grown to rue as time had gone by. This time though, she decided that she had to make a stand. She had a son of her own now, and she knew what it was like to be a mother. She decided that she would help to take care of Harry until Lily was able to resume her motherly duties.

Still unable to be totally polite to a wizard, Petunia snapped out her answer.

“Fine. I will take Harry but I cannot take Jamie as well. I do have a son of my own you know.”

Her snapped response did not seem to bother Dumbledore in the slightest. In fact, his smile grew until he was positively beaming.

“That’s wonderful. I will arrange for Harry to be dropped off later today, together with some of his things.”

Then without further conversation, Dumbledore popped out of existence with a small snapping sound.

Petunia barely noticed as her mind raced around the fact that she now had to tell her husband that they were going to be looking after a small child who belonged to her sister. She was a little afraid of his

reaction. A cry interrupted her musings – Dudley had woken up. Quickly she hurried off to check on him.

Later that day

A knock at the door signaled Harry's arrival. Petunia had sat down with Vernon and explained that she would be taking care of Harry until Lily recovered. She had made sure to tell him when she had Dudley sitting in her lap. Even though Vernon sometimes took his anger out on her, he would never hurt Dudley.

Petunia opened the door to reveal Dumbledore holding a small bundle in his arms. "As you can see I have brought young Harry with me".

Petunia reached out to take Harry just as he awoke. His big sleep laden green eyes stared at her and his bottom trembled as he uttered the word "Mama?" with a questioning tone.

"Shh, sweetheart, your mama is having a sleep and I am going to take care of you. I'm your Auntie Petunia."

Petunia watched as the toddler struggled to assimilate the information she had told him.

"Auntie Pnia" was Harry's jumbled response. "Hungry, pease".

Dumbledore interrupted the pair. "Well I must be getting off. I will be in touch."

With that, Dumbledore enlarged Harry's toys and clothes, which he had been carrying in his pocket, and with a small pop, disappeared.

Leaving Harry's things where they were, Petunia went into the kitchen with Harry to sort out some food. After dealing with Harry's needs, Petunia headed upstairs to pop him in with Dudley. She wasn't really surprised to see a second crib in the room already set up for Harry, but she decided to continue with her original idea and popped Harry in with Dudley. Both boys immediately snuggled up together.

Two months later

"I'm fed up with you running around after that brat. He isn't even yours." Vernon was growing rather red in the face as he screamed at Petunia, who was changing Harry's diaper.

"I couldn't say no, Vernon. He's just a baby."

"Well, I am sick of him. I want him gone. Today"

Petunia felt her heart sink but gritted her teeth and strengthened her resolve.

"No, Vernon. He's staying."

It took Vernon a second or so to realize that Petunia had actually defied him. With a roar, he backhanded her across the face.

"I said I want him gone, so do it." Vernon ground out spraying spittle all over Petunia's face.

Even though she was frightened of what Vernon might do, she stood her ground.

"No. I promised I would look after him until Lily was well."

At this point, Vernon lost it totally. He reached out to grab Harry, only to be pushed back into the wall by an invisible barrier. Harry was, by now, crying bitterly and managed to sputter out, "No hurt, Auntie Pnia."

A sharp crack signaled the arrival of a wizard. A shabbily dressed man materialized in the middle of the Dursley sitting room, holding a wand in his hand. He immediately realized what had happened.

"Moony" yelled Harry, and immediately ran across the floor, with his diaper half hanging off and with his arms outstretched, waiting to be picked up.

A grunting noise alerted the man that Vernon Dursley was about to get up again. Quickly he turned around, pointed his wand and uttered an incantation which immediately froze Vernon in place.

"Mrs. Dursley" the man said turning to Petunia, "I'm Remus Lupin, Harry's godfather. Dumbledore asked me to come when he detected a magical disturbance."

Petunia still hadn't moved, except to cup her face where Vernon had slapped her. On seeing her actions, Remus gently removed her hand and looked at the rapidly purpling area of her face.

"This won't hurt; I'm just going to heal your face."

Petunia felt an almost instantaneous relief. "Thank you."

She was just glad that Dudley was still sleeping. She had never known anyone sleep so heavily as Dudley, but this time she was grateful for it.

"What happened?" Remus gently enquired.

"He wanted me to get rid of Harry. I refused. I couldn't do it. He's only a baby. Even if I did want to get rid of him, where would I send him anyway? I don't know how to get hold of anyone from your world. Lily always sent me letters by regular post. She knew Vernon wouldn't like it otherwise."

A second crack signaled the arrival of Albus Dumbledore.

Dumbledore, like Remus, had his wand in his hand and he immediately took charge of the situation. Seeing Vernon's furious looking frozen face, he whispered "Consopio". Vernon immediately fell asleep and started snoring.

"I suggest we move to the kitchen." Remus said, walking in the direction of what he hoped was the kitchen.

Remus turned to Dumbledore. "When I arrived, I found out that Dursley out there had hit Mrs. Dursley because she refused to get rid of Harry. I healed her face."

Dumbledore looked grave. "Petunia, what do you plan to do?"

Petunia was silent for a moment. "I'm going to ask Vernon to leave. I'm not going to give Harry up, and, besides, Vernon is growing more and more violent. I'm afraid of what he'll do if he stays."

Dumbledore looked thoughtful. "I may have a solution to your problem. I was going to visit you tomorrow anyway. Lily has decided that she cannot take care of both Harry and Jamie, so she has asked me to arrange for alternative care for Harry."

At this point both Remus and Petunia interrupted Dumbledore with comments of disbelief.

"I'm sorry, but it's true. Unfortunately Harry will have to go to a wizarding children's home, until he is able to be taken in by a wizarding family."

"No, you can't do that. I've taken care of him for the last 2 months and I will continue to do so." Petunia's eyes were bright with tears and not a little fight.

"Petunia, it's the law in our world. Unless you are the natural parent of a witch or wizard or married to one, you cannot have permanent custody of a wizarding child."

Petunia felt her heart break. She had grown to love Harry as much as her own son. There was no way she was going to give him up, law or no law.

Albus interrupted her thoughts. "Petunia, I'm going to have to take Harry with me."

Up until now, Remus had remained quiet throughout most of the proceedings. He adored his godson and was willing to do whatever it took to ensure Harry's happiness and safety. However, until today

Albus had refused to tell Remus where he had placed Harry, just that he was safe. Remus would have taken Harry himself but as a registered werewolf, he was unable to do so by law. A thought then occurred to him.

“Albus, do you mind if I speak to Mrs. Dursley alone?”

Albus looked at Remus, trying to assess what he was going to say. It was at times like this when Remus was glad that he was proficient in Occlumency, a form of mind protection. Albus stepped out of the room. Once he had done so, Remus warded the kitchen to prevent Albus from overhearing their conversation, and turned towards an apprehensive Petunia.

“Mrs. Dursley, Petunia, please hear me out before you say anything. Can you do that?”

Hearing the plea in Remus’ voice, Petunia nodded her head in agreement.

“I don’t know if your sister has told you anything about me, but I have a problem which means I cannot take Harry. Please don’t be alarmed when I tell you this, but...” Remus halted and took a deep breath. He always found it difficult when he had to share his deepest, darkest secret with anyone. “I’m a werewolf.”

Petunia looked at him in surprise, rather than disgust. She didn’t even know that werewolves were real, let alone what it meant to be one.

“Tell me, please, what this means and why it concerns me.”

Remus let out the breath he had been holding. “I was bitten by a werewolf when I was just a child. During the full moon I transform into a ravaging beast. It doesn’t matter if I know you, I would attack and either kill you, or infect you with the same disease as I carry. That is why I cannot have custody of Harry.”

Instead of feeling terror, Petunia just felt sorry for this gentle looking man. She couldn’t imagine what it must have been like to undergo such a thing, especially as a child.

Seeing that Petunia wasn't fleeing in terror, or looking at him in disgust, Remus decided to continue, before he lost his nerve.

"As I said, I cannot gain custody of Harry, and as a muggle, you cannot retain custody of Harry now that Lily has revoked her parental rights. Tell me, do you want to stay married to Vernon?"

Petunia looked at Remus, trying to figure out where he was going with his line of questioning. Mutely she shook her head.

"Please feel free to refuse my request if you want. Petunia, I want you to marry me."

Petunia felt as though the world had stopped turning. She forced herself to concentrate on what Remus was saying.

"If you were to marry me, you would be able to retain custody of Harry. I would have a partner who could maintain Harry's safety during the full moon and you would be married to a wizard."

"Won't the law stop us from doing it?"

"No, there is no law to stop a werewolf from marrying or from having their own children, but if Bagnold, our current Minister, gets her way, it may well happen."

Petunia looked at the man in front of her, who was offering her a way of keeping her beloved Harry, and wondered if she could marry a stranger. A thought then occurred to her.

"What about the fact that I am married to Vernon? What will happen? It may take some time for me to get a divorce."

Remus grinned. "Dumbledore can pull strings I cannot, and I am sure he can arrange for the dissolution of your marriage quicker than you can imagine."

Petunia looked out into the sitting room at the overweight, overbearing man lying snoring on the floor, at Dumbledore who was

currently playing with Harry, and at the man who wanted to become her husband, and she quietly said "Yes".

Two weeks later

Petunia looked down at her left hand, at the new wedding ring that adorned her finger. She still couldn't quite believe it had happened. Dumbledore had looked ecstatic when she and Remus had announced that they were going to get married and had asked for his help. Within a week she was a divorced woman, and Vernon had moved out of the house, which Petunia kept as her parents had provided most of the money to pay for it when Petunia and Vernon got married. When her parents had died, the inheritance they left had paid off what remained owing on the house.

The wedding had been arranged for a week later and, in order to be able to adopt Harry, it had been a wizarding wedding. Albus had arranged for two witnesses from the Ministry to attend, while he officiated over the wedding itself. It hadn't seemed any different to Petunia from a muggle wedding, except for the fact that a magical ribbon had appeared at the end of the vows, and had bound her and Remus' hands together momentarily before vanishing. Apart from Albus, the two witnesses, Harry and Dudley, no-one else had attended the wedding. Remus had explained that unfortunately none of his school friends were able to attend. His one friend was dead, the other was in Azkaban, the wizarding prison, and the third one was missing. Albus had then arranged for Harry and Dudley to be looked after during Remus and Petunia's wedding night.

And this was it, her wedding night. Petunia was really nervous. They hadn't married for love of each other, but for the love of a child. She visibly jumped when Remus stepped into the sitting room, carrying a bottle of champagne and two glasses. Remus smiled when he saw how nervous she was. He felt exactly the same but was much better at hiding it.

"I thought you might like a drink" Remus said, as he passed a glass of the champagne to Petunia.

He could see her hand shaking as he passed the glass to her. She quickly downed it and held the glass out for another. Remus smiled inwardly and refilled it.

“I’m sorry, but I feel real nervous. I know that you didn’t marry me for love, and that you did it for Harry, and I’m sorry that you are in this position.” Remus stopped Petunia’s babbling by reaching to take her glass away, placing it on the table and gently kissing her. He could feel her still shaking and decided to try and make her feel more comfortable.

“Look, Petunia, I know we have to consummate this marriage to make it legally binding under wizarding law, but we don’t have to rush upstairs and do it right now. Why don’t we just sit down and talk for a while. We haven’t really had much chance to get to know each other, so let’s relax and talk for a while.”

Remus’ gentle smile, together with his kiss, had totally disarmed Petunia, who sat down with a smile and picked her glass back up; this time just sipping out of it as she relaxed slightly. By the time Remus picked up a third bottle of champagne and the glasses in one hand and grabbed Petunia’s hand with the other to lead her upstairs, they had finished two bottles of champagne and were both more than a little tipsy. On arrival in the bedroom, which had been redecorated and refurnished after Vernon had left, Petunia excused herself to go to the bathroom to freshen up.

Petunia looked in the mirror hanging on the bathroom wall and saw a thin, slightly red-faced blond looking back at her. She had allowed herself to get too thin she decided. After freshening up she quickly changed into a negligee and robe and headed back into the bedroom, her heart pounding so hard, she was surprised that the neighbors couldn’t hear it.

Remus had taken the time to use the guest bathroom and was already sitting in bed waiting for Petunia. She felt her mouth dry up as she looked at Remus’ partially covered body. His chest, which was bare, was covered with a light smattering of hair, and what looked like a few old scars. She had expected him to be wearing nightclothes, like Vernon used to. Her nervousness reignited, pushing aside the

feeling of alcoholic euphoria, and she turned to flee, only to find Remus had reached across the bed and grabbed her hand.

“Petunia, I won’t hurt you. Please, take off your robe, and sit in bed with me. We can just talk some more if you want. I’m not going to force you to do anything you don’t want to do.”

“You must think me really silly, panicking like a school girl.” Petunia found herself near to tears, as she removed her robe.

Remus just shook his head, smiled and gently pulled her under the covers with him, drawing her up close to his side so that she lay upright nestled in the crook of his arm. With his free hand he reached across and picked up a glass of champagne, which he passed to her. No longer feeling threatened, Petunia gratefully took the glass and relaxed.

By the time the bottle was empty, Remus had maneuvered the situation so that Petunia was now lying down next to him. Gently he put down the empty glasses and turned to Petunia, initiating a gentle kiss. He could feel her trembling slightly, but not as badly as she had been earlier that evening. Feeling her resistance give way, he gently slid his tongue into her mouth, deepening the kiss. He pulled Petunia closer to him and felt her start as she realized her negligee had disappeared. Realizing that she was about to panic, Remus broke off the kiss, and murmured soft words of reassurance to her.

“Nia, it’s alright, I’m not going to hurt you, just relax.”

His tone, rather than his words broke through Petunia’s panic fogged mind and she once again relaxed against him. These were the last words spoken between either of them again that night. Remus was as good as his word and was extremely gentle with her, waiting until she ready before he slid into her, completing their union and surrounding them with a gentle white light, which didn't dissipate until the couple had fallen asleep.

Chapter 5 – Lay of the Land

Remus opened the front door to see his wife sitting in her favorite armchair with their daughters sprawled out on the floor doing what looked like homework. On seeing Remus enter, Petunia got up and kissed him on the cheek and enquired after his day. Smiling, he pushed down his irritation. He hadn't the heart to tell her that sometimes he just wanted to get home, sit down and read the newspaper, and not indulge in a blow-by-blow account of his day.

"The boys' letters have arrived. I didn't open them; I thought you would want me to wait until you got home. The girls have been clamoring for me to read them since they arrived home from school."

"Thanks, Nia. Why don't we all gather around the table and see what the boys have to say?" Remus said, as he put his arm around Nia and drew her towards the dining room.

"Dear Mom and Dad

I made Ravenclaw with Harry. I just hope I will be able to keep up with the work. Our dormitory is real nice. I haven't got time to write much because Harry is waiting to send Hedwig, but I'll send you a longer letter when I have time.

Love Dudley"

"Dear Dad, Mom and Girls,

I am pleased to say that I have been sorted into Ravenclaw. I was really worried that Dudley would end up in Hufflepuff but thankfully he is in Ravenclaw with me. Draco Black is also here with us but so far he hasn't actually said much. He isn't what I expected him to be like. I'll fill you in more on things when I have time. I am just waiting from Dudley to finish his letter so we can send Hedwig to you.

I miss you guys already.

Love Harry."

On discovering the content of the letters, Remus was pleased that both boys had made it into Ravenclaw. He would have been horrified if either of them had been sorted into Slytherin, even though he wouldn't have said anything to either of them.

He turned to Nia and smiled, "I think I'll just pop upstairs and take a shower."

Remus quickly left Nia and the girls in the dining room, and hurried upstairs. Even though he was reasonably happy in his marriage, sometimes he just found married life a little too claustrophobic, and the bathroom was one of his retreats when he needed time to think. This time he used his shower as an excuse to think about his wife and his marriage. He knew that Nia had changed her appearance over the years in order to try to please him. She had stopped dying her hair blond and had let it return to its natural red color, leaving it to grow until it reached just below her neckline. She had only dyed it blond to look different from Lily. She was also a little plumper now, especially after giving birth to three more children. Remus definitely preferred her that way; he liked his women to have something to hold on to.

Not realizing that he was imitating his wife's earlier actions, he let his thoughts drift back to that fateful day when he had intervened at the Dursleys. He still didn't know what had possessed him to ask Nia to marry him when he did, as much as he had loved his godson. Not that he regretted it though, particularly when he looked at his children. He sometimes wished that Nia would lighten up a little though; some of her habits seemed ingrained and no matter how hard he tried, she refused to drop them.

He also thought about their wedding night. For him it had been something of a nightmare. He enjoyed women as much as the next man, but Nia had been skinny, skittish and definitely not his type. Getting her into bed had been like trying to coax a frightened colt into a halter for the first time. With the wedding taking place a few days before the full moon, the wolf in Remus had been howling for release. It had been very difficult for him to slow down and take things easy with Nia. What had made it worse was, even though she wasn't his type, the wolf in him hadn't cared. It had just wanted him to throw her

on the bed and take her without any pleasantries. He had been relieved when they had finally managed to fulfill the necessary nuptial duties.

The next day Remus had moved into the guest bedroom, saying it was to give Nia some space and time to adjust. He had then gone out to the nearest bar, found himself a “friend” and had satiated his sexual appetite with her; not that she had minded. It had been the same for him ever since. While Nia tried to be giving in the bedroom, she was neither particularly dominant nor adventurous. Even though he cared about his wife, he knew he didn’t love her. The wolf in him was always looking for something more and he felt the need to stray again and again in order to satisfy his carnal appetite, usually when it was close to the full moon. He hoped that Nia didn’t suspect, but if she did, she never gave him any indication of it. Deciding those thoughts were best left behind, he finished showering just in time to hear what sounded like one of the girls coming up the stairs, no doubt to tell him that dinner was ready.

Jamie Potter woke up smiling. He had written to his parents last night to tell them he had got into Gryffindor. He had also made some new friends. He looked around his dormitory. Ron Prewett lay to his left, snoring heavily. His actions were mirrored by that of Neville Longbottom who slept across the room from Jamie. The other two beds were filled by Dean Thomas, who Jamie hadn’t really gotten to know yet, and Seamus Finnigan, a half-blood. Seamus had announced this fact to the entire Gryffindor table the previous evening whilst Dean had sat there, looking around but not saying much.

Jamie knew Neville by reputation from attending some of the Ministry functions. He seemed a nice boy, if a little clumsy. During the Minister of Magic’s speech at the last function they had attended, Neville had knocked over several water goblets when he was trying to reach for the salt. Looking at Neville’s grandmother’s reaction, Jamie was glad that he hadn’t been Neville that night. Ron Prewett, however, was someone that Jamie had met on the train on the way to school when he had asked to sit in with Jamie. Neville had also joined them in their carriage as everywhere else had been full.

Shuffling noises alerted Jamie to the fact that the rest of his dormitory mates were starting to wake up. Wanting first dibs on the showers, Jamie quickly got out of bed and dashed to the showers. He was soon joined by the other boys. After showering and dressing, they all went down together for breakfast.

In the Great Hall Professor McGonogall passed out their timetables. Jamie noticed he had potions first thing. He was a little worried as he expected to have a hard time with Professor Snape during potions. He knew only too well from his father that Snape hadn't liked his birth father, and so Jamie had expected Snape to take his dislike out on him. What Jamie didn't realize was that his mother had once been good friends with Snape and, as a favor to her, Snape had agreed not to harass Jamie too much during his classes. Instead, Snape had decided to pick on Neville, who was shaking with fear.

Snape smiled a not very nice smile "Longbottom..."

Severus stormed down the corridor to his private quarters. He had had a bad day and he didn't care who knew it. Walking up to a blank section of wall, he checked no-one was around and whispered his password "Trueheart". The reasons he wanted no-one to overhear him were myriad; he enjoyed his privacy, he didn't want to admit entrance to anyone he didn't like, and he would never be able to live his password down. On entering his sitting room, he found his wife engrossed in a book. Suddenly realizing she was not alone, his wife looked up and smiled.

"Sev, darling. Bad day?" She grinned impishly at him. She knew how much he hated teaching the first years.

"I don't even know where to begin. First I get two Lupins in my classroom, one of whom couldn't even be bothered to pick up a book before he came to class. Then I get Potter, and worse, I can't even be nasty to the boy. Then to finish me off, I get Longbottom who is afraid of his own shadow." Severus ranted.

His wife narrowed the distance between them and kissed him. Severus felt all the traumas of the day melt away into significance. Opening his eyes he looked down at her. Virginie was tiny in

comparison. She couldn't have stood more than five feet two in her stocking feet. Her hair was like spun golden silk and hung to her waist when she let it hang freely. Her eyes were a limpid grey that Severus wished he could let himself sink into. They were about to start kissing again when they were disturbed by a polite coughing sound. Behind him stood their children; Hermione was grinning like a fiend whilst the two younger children just looked sick at their parents' loving display.

"Papa, I take it you didn't have a good day then." Hermione couldn't help herself, she burst out laughing.

Severus opened his mouth intending to take her to task, when he felt his wife squeeze his hand to halt his diatribe. He immediately got down to business.

"You could say that. Tell me what do you make of your friends in Slytherin?"

Virginie quickly ushered the two younger children out of the room and into the dining room, which lay just off the sitting room, to give Severus and Hermione some privacy to chat.

"Do you want the honest version or the watered down version?" enquired Hermione.

"I think the totally honest version, don't you?" Severus responded, smiling conspiratorially.

"Let's start with the girls then. Daphne Greengrass is okay. She seems very quiet, and has not teamed up with any of the factions that make up most of Slytherin." Hermione had already made up her mind to befriend the girl.

She continued her observations. "Millicent Bulstrode has already teamed up with two of the biggest idiots I have ever met, Vincent Crabbe and Gregory Goyle. She is almost as big as them, but I don't think she is as stupid as she is making out she is."

Hermione then turned her attention to the person she thought would become the ringleader in the first year. "Blaise Zabini is definitely

shaping up to be the leader of the first years. It wouldn't surprise me if he has been taught a thing or two by his mother."

Stopping for breath Hermione grinned at her father. Arabella Zabini had once tried to ensnare Severus, just after he had met Hermione's mother. Hermione's mother had put a stop to Arabella's machinations by grabbing Severus and soundly kissing him in front of everyone in the room. Even Arabella, who usually didn't care whose toes she stepped on, recognized the aggression displayed by the tiny Virginie and, against her will, had decided she liked the tiny woman. This ended her pursuit of Severus, and probably saved his life. It was common knowledge that Arabella's husbands met mysterious ends.

Hermione stopped smiling and went on with her evaluation. "Michael Corner is someone I really don't like. He thinks he is a cut above the other first years. A couple of second years put him in his place. Finally, Theo Nott is someone I don't think I'd want to mess with. There is something strange about him that I can't quite place my finger on. He scares me but I don't know why."

Hermione shuddered at the thought of Nott and grew quiet. She could see her father processing what she had said. To be honest, she knew that he had already made his own assessments but he liked to encourage his children to think for themselves.

"That's good, Hermione. You have pretty much confirmed my own thoughts. One day and they are already dividing themselves into camps. I did think this might take a little longer but as most of them already know each other; it is not a real surprise."

"Papa, what did you think of Jamie Potter?" Hermione was dying to know what her father really thought of the Boy Who Lived. She had a feeling that it wasn't going to be favorable.

"You should already know my opinion of the brat. It is only his mother's influence that has me cutting him any slack whatsoever. However, my patience will only last for so long. Potter had better watch his step." Severus almost spat the words out, his dislike for the boy apparent in his tone.

Hermione didn't even bother asking about the Lupins. She already knew the story of how Sirius Black had lured her father into the Whomping Willow where Remus Lupin had been waiting, already transformed into a werewolf. Even though it hadn't been Remus' fault, her father still couldn't bear to be around the man, and, now it seemed, also his children.

Severus looked at his watch. "Hermione, I think it is time for us to get to the Great Hall for dinner."

Severus quickly strode into the dining room to say goodnight to his younger children. They would be in bed before he returned from his duties that evening. "Olivia, Bas, be good for your mother. I'll see you tomorrow morning."

Severus then kissed his wife and left his quarters. Hermione had already left, not wanting to be late for dinner. She was a stickler for punctuality. She always had been, whether it was arriving on time for dinner or completing her schoolwork. She had been like it even as child. She was also usually never seen without a book. Severus remembered back to the first time he had laid eyes on her; she had been huddling in a closet gripping a book, and trying not to cry, while all hell raged around her. Arriving at the entrance to the Great Hall, Severus pushed those thoughts to the back of his mind and hurried up to the head table to sit down.

Harry sat down at the Ravenclaw table next to Dudley. This was the first real chance he had had to speak to Dudley since their arrival at Hogwarts. Due to a minor incident on his way from the transfiguration lesson to lunch, Dudley had spent a good part of the day in the hospital wing.

Dudley smiled at his brother, glad of the chance to catch up with him.

"Harry, have you heard back from Mom and Dad yet?" he enquired eagerly.

"No, I don't expect we'll hear anything for a while."

Harry then changed the subject. "Can I ask you a personal question, Dudley?"

"Sure."

"The sorting hat seemed to take ages when deciding which house to put you in. How come?"

Dudley took a while before he responded. "It wanted to put me in Hufflepuff at first but I knew you wouldn't be in that house. I thought you would probably be in Ravenclaw. I therefore begged the hat to put me in the same house as my brother. It said it didn't know which house you were going to be going into until it had seen inside your head. I told it I knew you would be a Ravenclaw and that was where I wanted to go. It said that I would struggle and probably let the Ravenclaw house down but if that was where I wanted to go, then who was it to argue?"

Harry was dumbfounded. His brother had risked a great deal on the chance that Harry would be placed in Ravenclaw. Harry squeezed his brother's hand, unable to say anything because he was too choked up to speak.

Dudley grinned. He understood Harry pretty well.

Harry quickly recovered his composure and turned to Dudley. "Well what do you think of our classmates then?" In the same way Severus had questioned Hermione, Harry already had formed his own opinions of his classmates but wanted to hear what Dudley thought. Sometimes Dudley lacked judgment when it came to making friends.

Dudley seemed thoughtful and pondered his response before opening his mouth to answer Harry's question. "I don't really like Anthony Goldstein. I thought Draco Black would be stuck up but so far he isn't. Terry Boot is okay but hasn't really said much to any of us.

I haven't really had much to do with the girls. Padma Patil seems okay." Dudley reddened a little before continuing, only pausing to thump Harry on the arm to stop Harry's snickering.

“Draco seems to know Pansy Parkinson quite well. Lois Green is definitely a pureblood because she has already looked down her nose at me when I tried to sit by her at breakfast this morning. I haven’t really had anything to do with the other girls yet.”

Harry looked thoughtful. Dudley had actually made a fairly good assessment of the other Ravenclaws in their year.

“Well enough of that, let’s finish dinner and head off to the Library. We’ve got homework to do.”

Dudley couldn’t believe how excited Harry seemed to be about having homework. He wondered if he had made the right choice in persuading the hat to put him in Ravenclaw.

After dinner, the boys headed up to the Library and found themselves a comfortable spot and settled down to get their homework finished.

Even though her father didn’t want to have anything to do with the Lupins, Hermione was in need of some study partners, and so far no-one in Slytherin seemed up to the job. Hermione spotted the Lupins huddled over their books in a far corner of the library.

Walking up to them Hermione took a deep breath and tentatively asked “I’m sorry to bother you, but would you mind if I joined you?”

Harry looked up to see Hermione Snape chewing her lip nervously. “Of course, please sit down.”

A loud voice interrupted their exchange. “You’re really going to let a Slytherin sit with you, Lupin? She only wants to copy your work.”

Hermione looked up to see Jamie Potter and his two sidekicks from Gryffindor, and decided to ignore them. She was glad when Harry and Dudley did the same.

“Suit yourself Lupin. Don’t say I didn’t warn you.” And with that Jamie stormed out closely followed by Ron.

Neville looked longingly at the small group before nervously smiling and saying “sorry”, before rushing out after the other two boys.

Chapter 6: Friends and Enemies

Albus Dumbledore sat in his office looking at the various instruments set up around his desk. To his left sat Fawkes, his phoenix, balefully looking at Albus from his perch. Albus just smiled, knowing that the phoenix could do little more than that to him. He had made sure of it. Fawkes represented all that was good and pure in terms of the Light, and, for the sake of appearances, Albus needed such a companion. Then again, what Fawkes actually wanted mattered little to Albus. A small instrument sitting on his desk began to chime, indicating that someone had entered the staircase leading up to his office. Albus glanced over at another instrument which showed him that it was Severus Snape. Seeing that it was only Severus, Albus didn't bother to put on his 'game face'; his potions master was as tied to Albus as Fawkes was.

Severus entered the office of the man who had condemned him to a life of servitude. How he hated the man sitting behind the desk. Albus Dumbledore had taken his trust and loyalty, and used it to serve his own ends. It was at times like this when Severus wished he had taken service with Voldemort; at least with Voldemort you knew what he wanted, and he didn't hide behind a benevolent public face.

"What can I do for you today, Severus?" Dumbledore enquired, waving his hand towards a seat to indicate that Severus should sit down.

Knowing better than to refuse, Severus sat in the closest chair to the door. "It's about Longbottom. That boy is a menace. It's only been four weeks since he started school, and he has already caused several injuries in my class, as well as melting four perfectly good cauldrons."

"So, what do you want me to do about it?"

Severus hated that Dumbledore was being deliberately obtuse. "I want that boy removed from my class, for good."

Dumbledore looked thoughtful. "Perhaps what Neville needs is a little guidance."

Severus knew that he wasn't going to like what was coming.

"I think that you should provide Neville with remedial potion lessons." Albus then sat back, waiting for the firestorm he knew his idea would provoke.

"You cannot be serious. It would be a complete waste of my time and energy to try to teach that dunderhead anything."

Severus would have gone on further, but Dumbledore interrupted his diatribe. "It wasn't a request."

Knowing that there was little else he could do, Severus stood up.

"Is there anything else I can help you with before you leave?" Albus enquired.

Not bothering to reply, Severus just shook his head and headed out of the door.

Albus sat back and watched as the door to his office was closed more than a little firmly by his potions master. Albus was sure that if given the choice today, Severus would have taken his chances with the Dark Lord, rather than submit to Albus' tender mercies. Unlike the Dark Lord, however, Albus did not choose to mark his followers on their left arm. Each of them wore a piece of jewellery which they were unable to remove unless Albus allowed them to, and, of course, that was never going to happen. The jewellery bound his followers to his service, as well as ensuring their silence. The consequences of trying to remove the jewellery or to speak out against Albus, were severe; as Severus had discovered on more than one occasion.

When Severus had first come to Dumbledore to beg for his help, Albus had toyed with the idea of placing a second spy in Voldemort's camp. However, he hadn't totally trusted Severus which was why he had decided to make do with the one spy he did have. His spy was more than capable, and she had a vicious streak that made Severus look like a puppy in comparison. Albus liked keeping Severus just where he was at the moment, providing the children of Hogwarts with

potions training, and, more importantly, providing him with whatever potions he personally required. Dismissing Severus from his thoughts, Albus realized that he was late for a meeting with the Minister, and quickly flooded away from his office.

Severus found himself angrier than he had been in a very long time. Not paying attention to where he was walking he bumped into Harry Lupin, almost knocking Harry over.

“Watch where you’re walking Lupin. Five points from Ravenclaw for blocking a teacher’s path.” Then, feeling somewhat better, Severus continued on his way.

Harry resumed walking towards the library, fuming. On entering, he spotted the Study Group tucked away in a corner.

He quickly marched up to Hermione. “It’s so unfair. Your dad just came storming up the corridor and nearly knocked me over. He then took five points from me for getting in his way.”

There were sometimes when Hermione hated the fact that her father was the potions master.

“Harry, I’m sorry, but I’m not going to keep apologizing for everything my father does. I’d spend most of my first year doing little else otherwise.” Hermione looked upset.

Harry let out the breath he’d been holding and relaxed. “No, I’m sorry. It’s not your fault that your dad is so unfair. It’s just that I try really hard in classes and it’s frustrating when I get points taken away just for walking in the corridor.”

Sitting down, Harry squeezed Hermione’s hand to show he really was sorry, and got out his books to start work. He could have groaned when he was interrupted by one his least favorite people.

“Hey, it’s the bunch of losers. What’s the matter, nobody else want to be friends with people like you?”

Harry turned around to see Jamie Potter, who had thankfully now finishing speaking, flanked by Ron Prewett, Dean Thomas and Seamus Finnegan. Sadly the peace didn't last for long.

Never one to be quiet, Ron chimed in "Yeah, you can't get any friends so you have to make friends with snakes and rejects."

Ron was looking pointedly at Hermione, Daphne Greengrass and Neville Longbottom. In keeping with her original plan, Hermione had befriended Daphne, and then, after asking Harry and Dudley if they minded, brought her along to the Study Group, as they called themselves.

Hermione knew she could make Ron's life very difficult, in potions at least, and didn't mind reminding him of the fact.

"Look Prewett, you seem to have forgotten who my father is. I can make things very tough for you in potions if you don't leave Daphne and Neville alone."

Ron just laughed "As if I'm afraid of your dad."

A shadow fell over the group.

"I'm glad to hear it, Prewett." came Severus' silky voice from just behind Ron's ear.

Nobody had seen the potions master enter the library as they had all been too engrossed in their conversation.

"Longbottom, you are to present yourself at 7pm every Thursday in the potions classroom for remedial potions."

Neville didn't say anything. He was too scared to.

"Do I make myself clear?"

Still unable to say anything, Neville just nodded.

Severus continued “And I suggest that you Gryffindors stop harassing the students in the library who are trying to get some work done. Otherwise I shall be more than happy to offer your services to Mr Filch.”

Severus enjoyed seeing the horrified looks on the faces of the Gryffindors and with that parting rejoinder, he swept out of the library.

“Stupid bat” murmured Ron.

Hermione turned to him. “Prewett, I suggest you do what my father says. I’d hate to have to mention to him about what was said here.”

Realizing that Ron was pushing his luck, Jamie grabbed him by the arm and started to drag him out of the library. With a nod of his head he motioned for the other two boys to follow.

Neville looked down at the table. He really felt like a coward. He should have something to the boys. Seeing his downcast face, Hermione reached across the table and took Neville’s hand.

“You’ve got to learn to ignore idiots like Potter and Prewett. They only say things to get a rise out of you.”

“But they’re right. I am a reject.”

Harry decided to step in. “Neville, you are not a reject. You stood up for Hermione when nobody else did. Even though she considers herself your friend, as do we all, if she didn’t think you had something to contribute, then she wouldn’t have asked you to join our Study Group.”

“She probably just felt sorry for me.” Neville felt as if he was going to cry.

A voice piped up from behind Neville. “I’d listen to Harry if I was you. Without your expertise in herbology, our Dirt Bombs would have failed.”

Neville looked around to see George Weasley. Unusually Fred was nowhere to be seen. The previous week the twins had been having trouble in making the dirt in their bombs spray the way they wanted it to. Neville had taken one look and realized that they had been using the wrong type of dirt. He had pointed them in the direction of the earth that remained in the pots after the mandrakes had been replanted. The earth not only held together well for throwing, but when it impacted it had sprayed spectacularly while making a high pitched squealing sound. The twins had been delighted.

"In fact, we would be more than happy to supply you with a few samples for..." George stopped upon seeing Hermione's disapproving look.

"For what, George?" she asked.

"For use on Ronald and his little buddies." George responded.

"Well," Hermione started, "if its for use on them, then who am I to say no. I'm just a snake after all."

Neville felt warm inside. Never before had he had friends like these. He was just glad that Ron and Jamie had decided to sabotage their friendship when they did.

Three weeks earlier

Neville entered the foyer to the Great Hall to see Ron and Jamie looking pleased. He hurried up to them.

"Hi, guys. What's happening?"

"Hi Neville. They've just posted a notice to say that flying lessons are going to start this Thursday. It's just too bad that they have to be with the slimy Slytherins." Jamie was really excited. He had been flying since he was small and couldn't wait to be able to show off his talents.

Neville felt his heart sink. He had only been on a broom once. He had ended up in St Mungos being treated by his mother.

He half-heartedly responded "Yeah, that's great" and forced a smile onto his face.

All three boys headed off to breakfast; Jamie and Ron trying to outdo each other with the escapades they had been involved in, and Neville lost in a cloud of misery at the thought of the upcoming flying lesson.

Before he knew it, Thursday had arrived and everyone was heading out to the quidditch pitch to start the lesson. Everything had been going well until Madam Hooch had been called inside to deal with an urgent matter. Realizing that he had lost his remembrall, Neville began looking for it on the grass. It had been a gift from his grandmother, and he didn't want to explain to her that he had lost it.

A voice from his above his head interrupted his search. "Hey, Neville, looking for something?"

On looking up, Neville noticed Jamie Potter holding his missing gift.

Ron flew up to Jamie. "Come on Jamie. Let's play catch."

Jamie had then thrown the remembrall in the air for Ron to catch. Neville could only watch.

"Come on Neville. Don't you want it back?" Ron threw the remembrall up in the air leaving Jamie little time to catch it.

Neville thought that it was going to hit the ground but luckily Jamie made the catch.

"Please give it back Jamie. It was a gift from my grandmother, and she'll kill me if anything happens to it."

"If you come up here, then I'll give back to you."

By now everyone else had stopped what they were doing to watch was going on. Hermione watched Neville Longbottom climb onto his broom and fly unsteadily up to where the two boys were hovering just above her head.

“I’m here. Can I have it back now?”

“Of course.” Jamie held up the sphere. “If you can catch it.”

With that Jamie threw the ball into the air and flew off. Neville didn’t dare take his hands off the broom, and watched in dismay as the sphere fell towards the ground. Just before it hit, Hermione Snape reached out and grabbed it.

“Hey snake, give it back” Ron shouted and flew down.

Of course Jamie Potter also had to get in on the action, and also flew down to stand by Ron. Neville slowly descended and was relieved to feel solid ground under his feet. His legs wouldn’t stop shaking though, and he immediately sat down on the ground.

“What, may I ask, is going on here?” The Scottish brogue of Professor McGonagall was unmistakable.

“That slimy snake has Neville’s remembrall, Professor.” Ron piped up, grinning at Hermione from behind the Professor’s back. “Neville dropped it and she won’t give it back”

The Professor looked round, and not seeing Neville, who was sitting on the ground, turned to Jamie. “Is this true Mr Potter?”

Not wanting to get his friend into trouble, Jamie confirmed Ron’s claims.

The professor turned to face Hermione. “Miss Snape, I am extremely disappointed. I would have expected better from you. Twenty points from Slytherin and detention to be served with me tomorrow night.”

Before Hermione could say anything, Neville stood up. “Professor McGonagall, Hermione didn’t do anything wrong.”

Noticing Neville, the Professor turned around to face him. “What were you doing down there, Longbottom?”

Seeing his friends’ furious looks, Neville gulped.

“Well, I’m waiting for an explanation.”

“Hermione didn’t take my remembrall, Professor. It was someone else.” Neville didn’t want to say who had taken it.

“If Miss Snape didn’t taken it, then who did? the Professor asked, looking more than a little irritated.

“I’d rather not say.” Neville looked at the ground, unable to meet his Professor’s gaze.

Realizing that Neville wouldn’t tell her, McGonagall turned to Hermione. “Miss Snape. As Neville is unwilling to tell me, perhaps you would enlighten me.”

Hermione cringed but met the Professor’s eyes and responded. “I’m sorry Professor, but if Neville doesn’t want to say, then I’m not going to break his trust. I cannot tell you.”

“Miss Snape, if you don’t tell me, it will be 100 points from Slytherin and a week’s detention.”

Seeing her housemates’ angry expressions, Hermione looked apologetically at Neville. “It was Ron Prewett and Jamie Potter.”

Getting angry now, Professor McGonagall snapped at Hermione “You expect me to believe that Neville’s friends did this. You should be ashamed of yourself Miss Snape. I am going to speak to your father about this.”

Seeing Hermione was about to say something, Professor McGonagall said “Don’t even bother to make excuses. I don’t want to hear another word, or it will be will 200 points from Slytherin and a month’s detention.”

Professor McGonagall had turned around to return to the castle when Neville’s voice stopped her.

“Professor, she’s telling the truth. They were playing catch with it.”

“Why didn’t you just tell me this?”

“I didn’t want to tattle on my friends.”

“Yeah, like we’d want to be friends with you now, Longbottom”. Ron interrupted.

McGonagall turned to the two boys. “Mr Prewett, I suggest you say nothing more. You and Mr Potter will both lose 10 points and report for detention tomorrow night with me. Miss Snape, you will lose 10 points from Slytherin for obstruction. In future Mr Longbottom, I suggest you try being honest from the start. 10 points from Gryffindor.”

With that she swept off. Jamie turned to Neville.

“I suggest you find some new friends, Longbottom.”

On seeing Neville’s distress, Hermione walked over to the boy and drew him to one side.

“Thanks for sticking up for me.”

“But I lost you points.”

“I know and it’s unfair, but I would have lost a lot more if you hadn’t been brave enough to tell the Professor the truth.”

“Yeah, and look where it’s got me. Nobody from Gryffindor will probably ever speak to me again and I haven’t got any friends.”

Hermione smiled at the disconsolate boy. “You’ve got me.”

Neville felt his heart lift and he smiled shyly back at her. At that moment the beginnings of a tiny crush began in Neville’s heart. “Thanks.”

He held out his hand “Hi, I’m Neville Longbottom. I’m pleased to meet you.”

Hermione shook his hand and said "Hello, I'm Hermione Snape and likewise."

The flying lesson had now finished and the groups were heading back to the castle. The pair had started to follow them, when Hermione stopped Neville.

"Look Neville, I'm part of a Study Group. I was wondering if you wanted to join?"

"Me?"

"Yes, you. I know Harry and Dudley won't mind, and neither will the others."

Neville thought about it for a minute. He knew that he would have no-one if he didn't accept. Besides, he really liked Hermione and it would mean that he would be able to spend more time with her. "Thank you. That would be wonderful."

With that the two resumed their journey back to the castle.

Present time

School continued without much drama until the night of Halloween. The children had all been sitting down to dinner when grunting and roaring sounds were heard coming from the corridor outside the Great Hall. Professor Quirrell had dashed into the Hall and had been about to say something when Dumbledore had stood up, raised his wand and the large doors had shut firmly behind Quirrell, blocking whatever was outside from entering.

Dumbledore then turned to the teachers sitting at the head table. "Please, all follow me."

Turning back to the hall, he addressed Professor Quirrell, "Professor, please stay with the children. We'll return shortly."

The teachers filed out of the side door to the right of the head table. Hermione, being one of the few who hadn't turned to watch Dumbledore, could have sworn that Quirrell's frightened look had turned furious for a moment before reverting back to its scared expression. Her ponderings were interrupted by movement at the Ravenclaw table. Harry was sitting grasping his shoulder as if in pain. Hermione started to rise from the Slytherin table but, on seeing her do so, Harry motioned that he was okay. Hermione looked once more at Quirrell. She wondered if she had imagined his angry look. She would have to speak to her father about it.

Chapter 7: All Things Snape

It wasn't long before the other teachers returned to the Great Hall, and the students were allowed to leave. Hermione hurried over to her father and asked if she could speak with him before breakfast. Severus indicated his acquiescence to her request and then ordered her to join her fellow Slytherins.

The next morning Hermione awoke early and dressed quietly so as not to disturb the sleeping girls in her room. On arriving at her parents' quarters, she whispered the password and, upon entering, found her father waiting for her.

"Good morning, Papa. I wasn't sure if you would up yet or not." Hermione said as she walked across the room to hug her father.

She noticed a pile of marked essays sitting on the side table to the right of her father. Her own essay was sitting on the top marked with a big red "O". She wondered what mark Harry had received, as they had worked on the assignment together.

"Salty" Severus called out.

A house elf appeared at Severus' side and bowed low.

"Miss Hermione and I would like breakfast, to be served in my study in about twenty minutes."

In a hurry to be out of Severus' way, Salty didn't even stop to acknowledge Severus' order.

"I can't believe he's still scared of you. He is really quite talkative when you're not around."

Severus glared at Hermione and she decided that maybe she should change the subject.

"Shall we go into your study, Papa? Hermione said quickly.

Severus, recognizing her effort for what it was, let the matter slide.

"I think that would be a good idea. From your expression last night, I believe you have something important to discuss with me." Severus followed Hermione into the study.

On entering the study, Hermione sat down on an overstuffed chair in front of the roaring fire. As a young child, she had loved to read in this room while her father reviewed essays. Severus seated himself opposite Hermione and indicated that she should begin.

"You remember how Professor Quirrell came dashing into the Great Hall looking frightened last night?"

Severus nodded.

"Well, after Professor Dumbledore told him to stay behind and watch over the students, I could have sworn he looked angry, in fact I'd say really angry. The next second his face was back to its original frightened expression. I wondered if I had imagined it, but I still wanted to talk to you about it."

Severus looked at Hermione and decided to be honest and share his opinion of Quirrell with her.

"I don't think you are imagining it. There is something about Professor Quirrell that I can't quite figure out."

Hermione sat in her chair, trying not to look excited about the fact she was right.

"However, you must promise me that you will do anything to antagonize Quirrell. I may be wrong about there being something off with him, but I don't want to take any chances."

Even though she thought him a little paranoid, Hermione promised her father that she would only observe Quirrell, and that she would be discreet when doing so.

Salty then popped in with their breakfasts. Hermione chatted with her father about the latest innovations she had read about in Potions

Weekly. Severus had taken out a subscription for her when she was seven, after she kept taking his copy to read. For a child of her age, she quite often made very insightful comments on what was in the journal.

After finishing breakfast, Hermione kissed her father and rushed off, carrying an armful of books needed for that day's lessons.

Severus watched her leave. He remembered how he had first seen her, huddled in a closet, hugging a teddy bear, crying silently. He smiled ruefully when he remembered his first encounter with her mother, just a few moments after spotting Hermione.

11 years earlier

In order to join the Dark Lord's ranks and bear his mark, Severus knew he would have to complete two tasks. The first was already completed; he had followed Dumbledore around for a week, and then reported to the Dark Lord on Dumbledore's movements. The only thing that Voldemort had seemed interested in was a load of mumbo jumbo that some woman, Sybill something or other, had spouted to Dumbledore. He hadn't been able to hear most of what she was saying because they had been in a pub in Hogsmeade, and an old hag had kept bursting into song, muffling most of the conversation.

Three months had now gone by. Severus had been contacted by his anonymous sponsor and told to report to a muggle warehouse by 10pm that night. On arriving at the warehouse, dressed in the requisite black, and wearing his white mask, Severus realized that he was not the only novice present. His sponsor, who wore a silver mask to signify his status, stood waiting with another white masked individual. Knowing better than to say anything, Severus remained quiet, waiting for his orders.

"You are to go the fourth house in the street adjacent to this one and kill the muggles you find there. You may torture them first if you wish." Their sponsor gave his instructions in a low, raspy and, obviously disguised, voice.

“Once you have finished, you will wait for further instructions from me. Am I clear?”

Both Severus and the other novice nodded, and started walking up the street. As they passed under a light, Severus noticed that the novice’s bodily outline left no doubt that his companion was a woman. From the rumors he had heard, there were very few women in the Dark Lord’s ranks.

Upon arriving at the house, the female novice entered first. Using hand signals, she indicated that Severus should search upstairs. He therefore climbed the stairs, and entered the first door he came to. From downstairs he heard “Crucio” which meant that the other novice was torturing one of the house’s occupants. His attention returned to the job in hand upon hearing a loud gasp and the sound of a door closing in one of the rooms ahead of him. He quickly entered the room he had heard the sound coming from but there was nobody there. However, a sound from the closet drew Severus to it. Holding his wand in front of him, he pulled open the door to find a small toddler clutching her teddy bear to her, crying soundlessly. In the next moment, he was attacked by someone who had obviously been hiding behind the door to the bedroom.

“You deatheater bastard. Get away from my baby.” A vase impacted his skull at the same time as he turned to see who had spoken the words.

Severus had expected to see a woman; he just hadn’t expected to see such a tiny one. Then her words finally penetrated his consciousness; she knew what he was. That meant this couldn’t be a muggle household as his sponsor had claimed. It certainly explained why the child had been crying soundlessly.

Grabbing the woman, Severus wrapped his arms around her to hold her still. He then put his hand over her mouth to stop her from making any further noise. Downstairs his colleague had obviously had enough of torturing her victim; the words “Avada Kedavra” drifted up the stairs to reach Severus’ ears. The woman in his arms must have also heard the curse being uttered, as she renewed her struggles, violently trying to break free of his grasp.

Putting his mouth close to her ear so his words wouldn't carry, Severus whispered "I suggest you stop struggling and remain very quiet if you want to live. Do you understand?"

The woman nodded her head, and Severus released his grasp on her. He quickly indicated that she should climb into the closet with her daughter. As soon as she did so, he cast a disillusionment spell on the pair, closed the door and banished any evidence of the broken vase. He completed his task with little time to spare. The other novice entered the room just as Severus turned away to pretend he was checking under the bed. The novice opened the closet door and, not spotting anything, closed it. Together they checked the other rooms on the floor and then went back downstairs to wait for their sponsor.

Their sponsor entered the house after about five minutes. Going from room to room, he checked that the novices had done as he had asked. On finding only one body in the kitchen, he returned to the novices.

"There was only one person in the house?"

Severus and the woman nodded in confirmation.

Their sponsor told them that they should leave the house. As soon as all three had exited the front door, he ignited the house with a murmured "Incendio", and soon the entire house was ablaze. The man then raised his wand to the sky and shouted the words "Morsmordre". In that moment, Severus realized who his sponsor was, as the moonlight hit a stray piece of hair that had struggled free from his sponsor's hood.

The man turned around. "You will both leave. Someone will contact you."

The silver masked man then apparated out of the area, swiftly followed by the female novice. Making sure that the man had gone, Severus apparated into the burning house and walked into the bedroom where he had hidden the woman and her daughter. Smoke had started to fill the room and Severus hurried to open the closet.

Severus removed the disillusionment charm and told the woman to hold on tightly to her daughter. Before the smoke got any worse, a sharp crack resounded in the room and Severus and his companions disappeared.

Another sharp crack signaled their reappearance. When the woman opened her eyes, she noticed that she was standing in a large white marble clad hall. Whoever this deatheater was, he certainly had money. Feeling her daughter wriggling in her arms, she noticed that she still hadn't removed the silencing charm from her. She turned to the black robed man and asked if he would do so for her. As soon as the charm was removed, the child's wailing filled the hall, making Severus wish he had left the charm on her. A loud crack was heard and Salty, one of his house elves, appeared.

"Master wants Salty?" the house elf enquired.

Severus removed his mask and turned to address the elf. "Yes. Please make sure my guests cannot leave but place them in the Blue Room and get them anything they need to make themselves comfortable."

With a snap of the elf's fingers, the woman found herself and her daughter standing in an opulently decorated bedroom. The house elf stood waiting patiently.

Realizing that she wasn't going to be leaving any time soon, she reeled off what she required to make them both comfortable. "I require a crib for my daughter, a change of clothes for both of us for tomorrow, diapers, baby food, milk, nightclothes and a cup of hot chocolate for me."

Within minutes, several elves had popped into the room carrying the requisite items. After a short investigation, Claudia discovered the bathroom, where she hurriedly bathed, fed and changed Hermione, before popping her into the crib. Even in the predicament she was in, she couldn't help but notice the beautiful carvings etched into the wood of the crib. Having cried for most of the evening, Hermione had now drifted off into an exhausted sleep, making little baby snores as

her chest rose up and down. Claudia jumped when Salty popped back into the room.

“Mistress, my Master said you is to join him for dinner.” Without giving her time to say anything, Salty popped out again.

Frightened at what would happen to her and her daughter if she refused, Claudia headed to the bathroom for a shower. On re-entering the bedroom, she discovered a set of blue dinner robes laid out on the massive canopy bed. There was also a set of undergarments in periwinkle blue to wear beneath the robes. Not one to put things off, Claudia hurriedly changed into the clothing provided. Salty reappeared at her elbow to show her where to go for dinner.

Claudia refused to move towards the door. “What about my daughter? I’m not leaving up here, not on her own.”

A pop indicated the arrival of another house elf; this one was obviously female. “I is Bright, Mam. I looks after little missy for you.”

Knowing house elves as she did, she knew that Bright would defend her child to the death. Smiling she thanked her and followed Salty to the door. The door opened on to a long, wide and well-lit corridor. On either side of the corridor stood numerous doors, each flanked by an ornate picture frame containing portraits of what Claudia assumed must be her host’s ancestors. Salty must have felt she was taking too long because he took her hand and proceeded to gently pull her down the stairs. On reaching the bottom, they entered the first set of double doors to the left.

Severus turned on hearing the doors to the dining room open. A vision in blue stood framed in the doorway, rendering Severus speechless. Gathering his tattered senses around him, he invited his guest sit down, and then took the chair opposite. After being serving the first course, he ordered the elves to leave until he called them again.

Claudia waited for Severus to say something, and when he didn’t, she decided that she would. She needed some answers. “I want to

know why you have brought us here. What are you going to do with us?"

"Well, I'm not going to kill you, if that is what you are worried about." Severus responded.

"Your friend had no problem in killing my husband, so you will forgive me if I don't seem entirely convinced by your answer." Claudia began to cry. It had suddenly hit her, that except for her daughter, she was on her own again in the world.

Severus didn't know what to do. He hadn't meant to make her cry. He tried again to convince her of his intentions.

"I'm sorry about your husband. We were told that it was just muggles who lived in the house. I didn't realize that a witch lived there."

It was the wrong thing to say. "You son of a bitch. You mean to say that if I had been a muggle, then you would have killed me too. Would you have killed my daughter as well? This is the reason why I left the wizarding world. I had enough of you deatheating bastards and your elitist crap when I lived in the wizarding world. I didn't expect to have to encounter this shit in the muggle one."

By now she was standing, her gray eyes flashing with a fire and passion that made Severus want to pull her across the table and kiss her. Deciding that might not be a good idea right now, he instead tried to explain his actions.

"I am sorry. Can I please start at the beginning?" Severus begged.

Wiping her face on her napkin, Claudia just nodded.

"I was invited to join the Dark Lord's ranks just over six months' ago. At the time I agreed with his policies, and thought joining would suit my purposes. He had offered me access to potion ingredients that even I, with pretty much unlimited funds, had been unable to obtain. He convinced me that I would be nothing more than his potions advisor. To show my commitment to his cause he set me two tasks. The first one I completed just over three months ago. I had to shadow

someone for a week and report on his actions, which I did to the Dark Lord's satisfaction. After returning to make my report, I was branded with a mark that would identify me as an initiate.

Two days ago, I received a missive telling me to report tonight to complete the second and final task before I became a fully-fledged member. I did not realize that I would be working with another novice, or that I was expected to kill someone to complete the task."

"You might not have killed him, but you let my husband die." Claudia said, struggling to hold back her tears.

"I'm sorry, but there was nothing I could do." Severus spoke honestly. He really did regret having to let the man die.

A thought occurred to him. "Why didn't you just apparate out of the house when you first heard us entering?"

"I tried. Someone must have set up a ward to prevent apparition."

Severus wondered if his sponsor knew that there had been a witch in the house when he had sent the pair to kill everyone in the building.

"My sponsor must have released the apparition wards in order for us to apparate out once he set the fire, or else it was tied to my initiate's identification mark." At this point Severus rolled up his sleeve to reveal a skull branded into his skin.

Claudia looked thoughtful. "I don't think your sponsor dropped the wards. I believe you were tied into them by your brand."

Another thought struck Severus. "Why would the Dark Lord want you dead? He must have known who you were for us to be sent to that specific house."

Claudia knew that she could no longer run from her past, and that she had to trust this man. She hoped that this wouldn't be her final mistake.

“My married name is Claudia Granger. However, my birth name was Virginie Claudine Lestrage.”

Severus sucked in his breath. If the rumor was true, then almost two years ago Voldemort had selected a young girl to become his bride. He had settled upon the daughter of Henri Lestrage, a French pureblood. However, she disappeared on the eve of the wedding.

“Yes” she said. “I was betrothed to Voldemort. My father wasn’t given any choice in the matter. I was young, beautiful, a virgin, and, most importantly, a pureblood. At first, I was honored that an English Lord would want to marry me. It was my brother, Rodolphus, who filled me in on the type of person I was going to marry. He considered it the ultimate honor. I decided that I would have rather died than marry that monster. On the day before the wedding, I packed up some of my belongings, plenty of money and a few photos, and fled the country.

On arriving in England, I immediately found a small flat to rent in a muggle area. I got a job working as a receptionist in a local dentist. I wasn’t very good at it though. To cut a long story short, Daniel Granger, the dentist, fell in love with me and asked me to marry him. Even though he was much older than I was, and I knew I didn’t love him, I accepted. All I wanted to do was escape from Voldemort, and move to where nobody knew who I was. After your visit tonight, I realize that I may not have been as well hidden as I originally thought.”

Claudia finished her confession, and rose regally from the table, looking every inch the pureblood Severus now knew her to be. “The question is, will you give me up to your master now that you know who I am?”

Severus looked down at the petite blonde-haired woman, and knew he could never give her up. He wasn’t sure if it had happened when she had hit him over the head with the vase, or whether it was when she had stood framed in the entrance of the doorway to the dining room, but he realized that he had fallen in love with her. Shocked at his own revelation, he looked away from her in an effort to compose himself.

“So, you have decided to hand me over then?” Claudia spat, misunderstanding Severus’ actions. “I should have known better than to trust a deatheater.”

She turned and started to walk out of the room, only for Severus to reach out an arm to restrain her. “I give you my word that I will never give you or your daughter up to Voldemort.”

At his words, Claudia collapsed into Severus’ arms and started to weep quietly. The relief she had felt on hearing his vow had swept over her like a tidal wave, reducing her to tears. Severus picked up her and carried her in his arms to the nearest armchair where he sat down, murmuring gently to her while she cried into his chest. The storm of weeping eventually passed and, feeling her go limp, he realized she had cried herself to sleep.

Not bothering to call for Salty, Severus lifted up the exhausted witch and carried her to her bedroom. He sat down with her still held in his arms on the chaise longue close to the flickering fire, having convinced himself that she couldn’t be left on her own. In truth, he just wanted to spend one night holding her. He knew that once she awoke, she would reject him, just like the last woman he had fallen in love with.

Chapter 8: God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

After watching Quirrell for over a month, Hermione came to the conclusion that she must have been imagining his expression during the Halloween dinner. After speaking to her father, they both agreed that unless something out of the ordinary occurred, they would leave Quirrell to his own devices. After their discussion, Hermione left the dungeons and headed off to join the rest of the Study Group.

The Study Group now had an established table in the library, which the rest of the school avoided sitting at. Apparently the rumors were that only losers joined the Study Group with some students going so far as to nickname them "The Outcasts". Harry didn't really care and he actually preferred this name to "the Study Group". Despite their reputation, the Study Group continued to expand, mainly by invitation, taking in Hogwarts' waifs and strays.

Neville had never been happier in his entire life than when he was with the Group. He was glad Hermione had asked him to join. His feelings towards Hermione had grown even more. He really enjoyed her company, more so than anyone else's. He had written home and told his mother about how nice Hermione had been. Little did Neville know it, but his mother had decided that should their friendship continue, once the children reached the age of 13, she would issue a formal betrothal request. This was standard practice in older wizarding families. Alice knew that the Snapes were of noble origin and, as such, Hermione would make a most suitable candidate for Neville's future wife.

Meanwhile, Neville had extended an invitation to join the Group to Dean Thomas. Dean had been embarrassed by Ron's actions towards Hermione and the other Group members, and had taken Ron to task about it. This resulted in Dean being regarded, so far as Ron, Jamie and Seamus were concerned, as "being as big a traitor as Longbottom". It hadn't taken Neville long to find out what had happened, and for him to invite Dean to join the Group, which the lonely boy had quickly done. Dean's joining had added a fun element to the group for, like Dudley, Dean was not the most academically successful boy. However, unlike Dudley, he had a talent nobody else had; he was an accomplished artist. Each of the Group now had

bookmarks that were caricatures of themselves. In fact Hermione had two, one of herself, and one of her father (this one she took great care never to let Severus see).

The Weasley twins had, of course, pretty much invited themselves to join. They shamelessly used Hermione and Neville's respective knowledge of potions and herbology, to improve upon their experiments. This added input improved the twins' products so much they decided that once they left school, they were going to put Zonko's out of business by opening up their own joke shop. They both promised Hermione and Neville that they would give them 5 of any profits they made on any of the items which Hermione and Neville had helped to improve upon.

The final two additions to the Study Group came as a bit of a shock to the Group. Both girls were popular and well-liked; the Group was generally made up of the loners of the schools. Dudley, in the midst of an adolescent crush on Padma Patil, had decided in a surprise move that he would ask her to join them. He wanted to be able to sit and look at her without anyone getting in the way (Harry had found this a little creepy when Dudley had explained his reasoning behind the invitation to the Group). What had surprised the Group more was that Padma had blushinglly said yes, and then promptly invited her best friend, Su Li to join them as well.

The Outcasts, as they had agreed to rename themselves, (Padma and Su Li hadn't really been in favor of the name change but felt that as newbies they should go along with it), were now all on their way outside to watch the Ravenclaw quidditch team practice before the Ravenclaw/Slytherin match. None of them, except for Harry and the twins, were really big fans of the sport, but the weather had turned surprisingly nice for the time of year, and, as they had all finished their homework, they agreed that they should make the most of it

As they were all filing out of the library, Harry noticed Potter and his cronies almost completely hidden by several large piles of books. It wasn't the fact that students were studying in the library that caught his attention, it was the fact that the Golden Trio, as they had now come to be known, were actually bothering to pick up a book. The threesome were hardly known for their academic prowess.

Harry grabbed Hermione's arm as she moved past him. "I'll join you guys in a while. I just realized I forgot to look up a date for my History of Magic homework."

"That's great, Harry. I have something I want to look up as well, so I'll stay with you." Harry should have known he wasn't going to get away with his subterfuge.

Hermione called out to the Weasley twins who were the last ones to leave the library. "Guys, we'll be out shortly. There's something we need to check on."

The twins waved in acknowledgement and carried on walking. Hermione turned to Harry, grabbed his arm and dragged him into a nook a few aisles down from where the three boys were sitting.

"Come on Harry, what gives? I know you've finished your history homework; I even watched you read it over a couple of times to make sure you had everything correct." Hermione questioned Harry, knowing she was right.

"Hermione" Harry responded. "Sometimes you are really observant when it comes to looking at something that is under your nose, but at other times you miss things that stand out a mile."

Harry turned Hermione around to face the backs of the three Gryffindors. "Tell me what you see."

Hermione looked, and then it fell into place. How could she have been so stupid? Granted it was perfectly normal to see the three boys in the library, but with that many books? The thing that should have made it most obvious they were up to something was the fact that none of them were making a sound; usually all you could hear was their complaints about how much homework they had to do. Today, apart from the odd hushed whisper, the boys were silent. Harry realized from Hermione's face that she had cottoned on to what he had been suspicious about.

"So what would you like me to do?" Hermione asked Harry.

"I am going to go to the left of the boys and check out what Prewett and Potter are reading. It would be helpful if you could go their right and do the same to Finnegan". Harry started to wander off almost before he had finished speaking.

Hermione quickly hurried to fulfill her part of the deal. However Harry had set off before her for a reason; just as he reached Ron's side, he nudged a pile of books sending one flying to the floor. All three boys turned to look at Harry, allowing Hermione a totally unfettered look at all the books on the table.

Harry looked on the floor and, spotting the book he had knocked off, picked it up. He only had a quick chance to look at the title before Ron grabbed it from him. "Hands off, Lupin. You don't see me trying to take your books when you're studying."

"Interesting book, Prewett." Harry had taken note of the title before Ron snatched it back. "Got something magical you need solving?"

Ron turned red "As I said, Lupin, it's none of your business. Go play with your snake friend." Ron had spotted Hermione standing looking innocently at the bookshelf to the right of the table.

"Come on, Hermione. I've got better things to do than listen to the same old drivel yet again." With that Harry grabbed Hermione by the elbow and led her away from the boys, who were once more back to whispering under their breaths; this time interspersing the whispering with suspicious looks at Harry and Hermione.

The two children hurried back to the same nook where they had started their conversation. Harry turned to Hermione and asked what she had seen.

"Well, I could only see two books, "So You Think You Know Hogwarts" by Ivor Mapp, and "Wizards Legends: History's Makers" by Nora Winner. How about you?"

"The book I picked up from the floor was "Most Magical Mysteries" by Ima Conundrum. Ron had hidden the rest with his body by the

time I stood back up. However, I did hear the name “Nicholas Flamel” mentioned as I approached the table. I know I’ve heard it somewhere, but I can’t remember where.”

Hermione looked perplexed. She too had heard the name, but like Harry, couldn’t remember exactly where she had heard it.

“Do you think we should start looking through some books now?” Hermione asked rather excitedly.

“No, I really do want to see some of the quidditch practice before dinner. Come on, we could both do with some fresh air.” Harry turned and headed towards the exit.

Not wanting to be left on her own in the library with the Gryffindor trio, Hermione decided to follow Harry.

No sooner had Hermione left the library, when a tall shadow fell upon the nook she and Harry had been standing in. Severus stepped out fully from behind the bookcase he had been hiding behind. He hadn’t intended to eavesdrop on his daughter’s conversation with Lupin, but had been looking for a potions text he needed for one of his experiments when he had first heard the children’s conversation. Intrigued, he had decided to stay where he was until he knew exactly what they had found out. Now the children had left the library Severus resolved to find out himself what the Gryffindors were up to and, in search of the truth, left his hiding place.

“Now, why is it that on such a fine day and, when there is a quidditch practice, you three suddenly seem inspired to visit the library when normally you have to be dragged kicking and screaming into here?” Severus enjoyed watching the panicked expressions cross the boys’ faces.

He turned to Potter. “Come on Potter, I’m waiting.”

“We wanted to get ahead with our homework while it was quiet, Sir.” Potter looked pleased that he had come up with a plausible response.

“Hmmm. I should like to see the homework that has you all so enthralled. So what is it then?” Severus drawled, knowing they were, of course, lying to him.

Ron shouted “Charms” as Potter muttered “History”.

“Well, which is it, charms or history?”

“Both, Sir”. Potter ground out, giving Ron a look that Severus understood to mean “shut up and let me do the talking”.

Noticing a book lying on the floor (Harry had knocked off two and hadn’t noticed the second one); Severus picked it up, taking note of its title. “10 points from Gryffindor for being careless with school property and a further 10 points for lying to a teacher.”

Severus dropped the book on to the table and marched out of the library. Some of his joy in taking points was tinged with the annoyance that Lupin had been right; the Gryffindors were up to something, and he had a sinking feeling that he knew exactly what. He just hoped that Hermione and Lupin wouldn’t remember where they had heard about Flamel. He didn’t want his daughter being dragged into something dangerous. What the Gryffindors did though wasn’t any of his concern, and he dismissed them from his thoughts, and started to return to the dungeons. He had gotten half way there when he remembered about the potions text he had originally gone to the library for. Swearing under his breath, Severus turned around and headed back to the library.

Time flew by and neither Harry nor Hermione had any luck with their research into Nicholas Flamel. They did wonder if Harry had misheard Ron, or if the Gryffindors had gotten the name wrong. Deciding it was taking up too much of their time, both children came to an agreement; if they came across Flamel during the course of their studying, then fine; however, they weren’t going to waste any more time on finding him. They had better things to do.

Before they knew it, Christmas had arrived and it was the last day of school before the holiday break. Children were running around, saying goodbye to their friends and trying to make sure that they had

everything before they went down to the train station. By late morning, most of the school had boarded the Express except for the teachers, Harry, Dudley and Hermione, and those students who were staying at Hogwarts for the Christmas break.

Ron was originally supposed to have been staying at Hogwarts with Percy because his mom was going to visit his brother Bill in Egypt. Bill didn't have enough room for Ron and Percy to stay; as it was Bill was going to bunk in with a friend and let his mom and sister have his room. Molly had wanted to go to visit Charlie, but had changed her mind when she found out that Arthur, Andy and little Artie were going there for Christmas. Jamie had written to his parents and asked them to extend an invitation to Ron, which Molly had approved, and so Ron had joined Jamie on the Hogwarts Express to stay with Jamie and his family for Christmas.

Hermione was flooing from Hogwarts with her father. Her mother and the younger children had already left the previous day to get the house ready for Christmas. Seeing Harry and Dudley standing in the doorway to the Great Hall, Hermione hurried up to them.

"Harry, Dudley, I've sent your presents directly to your home." Hermione hugged them both. "I'll see you in January."

The boys, who had already given Hermione her presents earlier that week, hugged her back. Hermione then set off towards the dungeons to floo home.

Harry looked at his watch. "Come on Dudley. We're going to be late if we don't hurry."

Harry and Dudley left the castle not carrying any discernible luggage with them. It was in fact riding in their pockets, having been shrunk earlier that day by Professor Flitwick. Instead of joining their friends on the Express, Remus had arranged for the boys to meet him at the school gate in order to take them directly to London Heathrow. After several years of nagging, Remus, suffering from a massive fit of guilt over his latest romantic escapade, had agreed with Nia that they could take the children to Disney World in Florida for Christmas. He

had even agreed that they could travel by muggle means on the outward journey, but only if they returned by portkey on their way back.

Remus was waiting for the two boys when they reached the gate.

“Do you have everything you need?” he asked the boys.

Both boys tapped their pockets in silent affirmation of his question.

Remus grabbed each boy by the hand and said “Hold on tight”. When the boys opened their eyes, they were standing in the apparition area for departures from Heathrow.

“Where’s mom?” asked Dudley.

“She’s waiting for us at the check-in area with the girls” Remus responded, as he steered the boys out of the wizarding section of the airport and into the muggle one.

On spotting his mother, Dudley broke into a sprint, closely followed by Harry. Throwing themselves on her, both boys enveloped her in a hug.

“Dudley, Harry, please let me breath.”

The boys let go of their mother to be encircled by their sisters, whose main concerns were whether the boys had remembered to buy them anything for Christmas, and, if so, where was it.

Remus shepherded the family towards check-in with their luggage. He had re-enlarged the boys’ luggage before entering the muggle section of the airport. After what felt like a very long hour, they had all finally shown their passports and handed over their luggage. Their pets were going to be taken care of during the holiday. This had caused the boys’ only hesitation when they were told about the holiday. Hermione had agreed to take Hedwig over Christmas, and Dudley’s cat had been collected a week earlier, and deposited with Mrs. Figg, a cat loving squib who lived around the corner from the Lupins.

Everything was going well as the family headed through passport control. They then joined the line for the security scanner. Nia went through first, and then the children followed one by one. Remus followed to the rear of the group. As Remus stepped into the scanner, all hell broke loose. He immediately grabbed his ear and fell to the floor, his body convulsing and his eyes rolling into the back of his head.

“Remus” Nia screamed as she tried to push back past security to get to her husband. Harry and Dudley held her back. Both children, having been filled in on muggle customs by their mother, recognized the medical team, which had been alerted by security that was making its way towards the stricken man.

Harry turned to Dudley and spoke in a low, authoritative voice. “Let’s take Mum and the girls to the side.”

Dudley just nodded and started to shepherd the girls and his mother away from the horrific scene.

The medical team ordered the area cleared, as they started to work on their patient. The remainder of the Lupin family was led away by security into a room just off the security area. As the door closed behind Harry blocking out the scene, two things struck him; the first was that someone in the medical team was shouting “We’re losing him”, and the second was Remus’ gold earring, the one he never took out, lying on the floor, next to his body.

Chapter 9 – Reunions and Revelations

Hogwarts 11.55am

Hermione headed off to the dungeons. She had arranged with her father to meet him in his rooms, so that they could floo home together. On her arrival, Hermione made sure she had all the books she would need during the holidays. Her father made a point of locking the world out when he returned home for any holiday; Christmas would be no exception. If Hermione had forgotten anything, she would have to wait until she returned to school in January to use it.

She had just finished checking that she had everything she needed, when the door opened, revealing her father. "I'll be just one moment; we can then floo out."

Severus headed quickly into his bedroom where he took out a small bag which he had already reduced in size so it would fit easily into his pocket. He then headed back into the sitting room and from there, into his study. He stepped aside to allow Hermione to head into the fireplace first. After she had disappeared, Severus entered, threw down his floo powder and called out "Solitude".

On arrival at his destination, Severus quickly stepped out of the fireplace. He then placed his hand on a large inset stone to the right of the fireplace and declared his name. The stone momentarily turned green. Severus then intoned the words "Occludo Non Familia" and the stone once more turned green before returning to its inert state. The stone controlled the wards for the entire estate. Severus had effectively shut out anyone who wasn't family from gaining entrance to the Snape estate. Any owls were automatically directed to a holding pen on the outskirts of the estate, where their messages were then removed and the birds released.

Salty appeared and bowed low to Severus. "Salty is here, Master."

"Take Miss Hermione's bags to her room."

Salty turned away from Severus and picked up Hermione's things. She smiled at the house elf, who, seeing that Severus was not

looking his way, winked at her. Hermione stifled the giggle that threatened to escape. It wouldn't do for her father to see Salty acting in such a familiar manner, even though she and the house elf had been good friends since she was small. With a small pop, Salty and her luggage disappeared.

Hermione and Severus headed out of the Carriage House. This was where everyone, including the family, disembarked after flooing into the Snape estate. Severus preferred to have plenty of warning should his defenses be breached.

The pair climbed into the carriage that was waiting to take them to the Main House. The carriage set off and rumbled slowly up the long driveway before disappearing out of sight.

London, 6pm

Exhausted, the Golden Trio had slept through most of the journey back to London. All three had spent most of the previous night finishing off homework which they had ignored in favor of trying to find out something on Nicholas Flamel. None of the boys had found anything and each agreed to continue the search on their return to school. Jamie promised to look in his family library if his parents went out.

As soon as the train pulled into the station, Jamie and Ron said goodbye to Seamus, who was flooing back home to Ireland. Jamie pushed through the crowds looking for his parents. Spotting his mother standing by a porter, he called out to her.

Lily turned around and saw her son being closely followed by a redhead. "Jamie, how wonderful, you're back."

"Mum, this is Ron. Ron, this is my Mum." Jamie's introductions were a little lacking in formality.

Lily shook hands with Ron. "Hello Ron. As you may have guessed, my name is not 'Mum'. Please call me Lily."

Ron reciprocated. "I'm pleased to meet you, Lily." Molly, Ron's own mother, had always drilled it into him that he should call adults by their last names, unless invited to do otherwise. Even though Lily had given Ron permission to call her by her first name, he still felt a little nervous addressing his best friend's mother by anything other than her surname.

"Where's Dad?" Jamie interrupted Ron's nervous reverie.

"He's still at work. He won't be home until late tonight. St Mungo's is having a ball, and your father offered to provide cover so that the other doctors from his shift could attend." Lily smiled at Jamie's downcast expression. "He's sorry he couldn't meet you. He offered to provide cover tonight so that he wouldn't have to work over Christmas. Come now, let's hurry and get home. Minto is waiting with hot chocolate and cookies."

Quickly recovering from his disappointment, Jamie whooped in delight and rushed off towards the floo departure point. Lily and Ron followed at a slightly more leisurely pace. Lily paid the requisite fee and told Ron the address. Lily first watched Jamie disappear in a flash of green flames, and then Ron. Checking that the boys hadn't left anything behind, she stepped into the fireplace herself, threw down a handful of floo powder and said "The Retreat", before disappearing from view.

Even though Neville had had Dean to keep him company during the trip home, he felt a little disappointed that Harry and Dudley hadn't accompanied them. He thought it was very exciting that the boys were going to be traveling on a muggle plane. Neville was convinced that somehow muggles could do magic; otherwise how did the planes stay in the air? Harry and Dudley had both tried to explain the mechanics behind flying but Neville still thought that they were making it up, and that it was magic that made the planes fly. Not being very fond of heights, Neville was glad he was on terra firma, and not high up in the air, especially if it was true and it wasn't magic that made the planes stay in the air.

His grandmother, Augusta Longbottom, and sister, Seville, were meeting Neville at the station. His mother, like Lily's husband, was

covering for her colleagues so that they could attend the ball. This would mean that, barring an emergency, she too would be home during Christmas. On exiting the barrier, Neville was almost knocked over by his little sister throwing herself into his arms.

“Nev, you’re back at last. I’ve missed you so much.”

“Seville, please try and conduct yourself in a manner befitting a young lady”, Augusta Longbottom sharply rebuked her granddaughter, “and Neville, do stand up straight.”

Both children immediately separated and replied “Yes, Gran”.

Noticing her chauffeur, Parker, approaching the group, Augusta asked him to take Neville’s luggage and put it in the car. “We shall be along presently.”

Augusta turned to face her crestfallen grandchildren. She hadn’t meant to snap at them but sometimes being the head of the household was just too much for her. Not only was she conscious of the fact that she needed to portray a certain persona for the outside world, but mostly she was aware that it should have been her son Frank’s responsibility. By now she was supposed to have taken a step back and handed over the reins of the family business to her son; instead, due to his death, she had once more been forced to assume responsibility for all of the family.

“I have an idea. Why don’t we stop off at French Fancies and pick up some pastries for tomorrow afternoon. Your mother will have finished work, and the four of us can have high tea together in the playroom.”

Even though it wasn’t Neville’s idea of fun, he understood the effort his grandmother was trying to make and smiled at her, while gently squeezing his sister’s hand to make sure she didn’t say anything. Feeling a little happier, the dignified old woman then swept out of the train station. Neville quickly hugged his sister and pulled her after their grandmother.

Hogwarts 9am

Minerva McGonagall spotted Filius Flitwick shepherding some of the Ravenclaw first years towards the Great Hall. She had been looking for him for some time.

"Filius, can you spare a moment?"

"Of course, Minerva. What can I do for you?" the diminutive teacher enquired.

"I believe that you have been relieved of duty over Christmas, and are going home?"

"Yes, I shall be returning a few days before the children are due back. Poppy Pomfrey kindly volunteered to take my place in staying behind at Hogwarts over the holiday. She said she would probably just get called back anyway, so she might as well stay here."

"I am planning to leave at around midday and I was wondering if you cared to accompany me on the walk down to Hogsmeade?"

Filius wondered what the witch needed to discuss with him. He knew it must be something important otherwise she wouldn't have sought him out in this manner.

"Midday works well for me. I'll meet you at the gates."

Minerva thanked him and disappeared in the direction of Gryffindor Tower.

Hogwarts Midday

At the appointed time, Filius was standing at the exit to the school, when he spotted Minerva heading towards him. Smiling she joined him as he led the way out of school and towards Hogsmeade and the Three Broomsticks. Neither spoke a word until they reached the confines of the pub.

"Filius, I'd be glad if you would join me at my home for a spot of Cognac."

Minerva was aware that Flitwick had a partiality towards the amber liquid.

“I’d be delighted.”

They flooded out of The Three Broomsticks and into Minerva’s home. Minerva had once lived in Scotland, but after the death of her husband, Fitzwilliam, she had decided she needed a change of scenery, and had closed up the family home. She had relocated to a small wizarding village in the Lake District, close to Lake Windermere.

Minerva's Home 1.10pm

Minerva didn’t hesitate on arriving at her home; she immediately shut down the floo, and then walked across to the drinks cabinet, where she poured Filius a generous splash of Cognac and herself a white wine. Contrary to rumors, she couldn’t abide Scotch whisky. She then saluted Filius with her glass.

“I suppose you are wondering why I brought you here.”

“To be frank, yes, I am. But I believe I know you well enough to comprehend that you wouldn’t have extended an invitation without good reason.”

Minerva didn’t quite know where to start. She had been concerned about Headmaster Dumbledore’s actions, but every time she had started to think about them, she would end up in pain and unable to speak or move.

“Before I begin, may I ask you to swear an oath on your magic that anything we say will remain between us?”

Filius acquiesced to her request and made the oath, momentarily being swathed in an ice-blue light, before he felt the oath’s binding settle around him like a mantle.

“What do you think of the headmaster?” Minerva felt the first twinges of the pain that always afflicted her when she tried to think negatively of the headmaster.

Filius immediately felt his guard go up. He wondered if Minerva had any idea of Filius' real reason for working at the school.

"May I ask why?" he asked her hesitantly.

"I can't really say." Minerva felt the pain abate on her refusal to answer.

Filius, who had been watching Minerva's face during the conversation, and had immediately noticed that she had been in pain when trying to talk about Dumbledore, which had appeared to recede when she stopped.

Filius wasn't one of the best charms experts for nothing, and he had a feeling that someone had placed a fairly substantive charm on Minerva.

"I believe someone has placed a charm or binding on you. Don't respond to my statement; I don't need you to upset the charm by doing so."

Filius then raised his wand and slashed it in the air muttering the words "Vinculum Aperio" as he did so. Minerva immediately gasped in pain and grabbed at her throat where a necklace depicting edelweiss glowed bright pink.

Filius immediately cancelled the spell. His suspicions were correct. Minerva had been subjected to a bond, and judging by the color and her reactions, it was vicious in nature.

Minerva then launched into a conversation about the children in her year, and her pain immediately abated. Filius made a note that not only did the binding cause her pain if she tried to discuss Dumbledore's actions, but that it also appeared to have some sort of diversionary spell on it; hence Minerva's abrupt change of topic.

Minerva enquired whether Filius would like to stay the night, but he declined stating that he needed to get home; he already had dinner plans that he couldn't change. Exchanging Christmas pleasantries,

the two parted company, Minerva to lie down and Filius to head off to his home.

Hogwarts 12.05pm

Harry and Dudley Lupin passed by Albus Dumbledore as he watched his charms and transfiguration teachers head off together out of the school gates. As they were both leaving the castle for the Christmas break, he didn't feel unduly alarmed. However, when little over an hour later his wards starting vibrated, he wondered if he hadn't been a little hasty in dismissing his concerns.

He headed to his office to check on his monitors, being stopped briefly by Poppy Pomfrey who needed a list of all the children who were staying in the castle over Christmas. After promising to supply her with the list, Albus continued on his journey towards his office. Poppy's interference with Dumbledore's mission meant that he just missed a pink cloud appear above the silver hewn monitor sitting on his desk. The pink cloud was subsequently obliterated by a puff of black smoke.

Albus headed into his office and noticed the black cloud which had taken the shape of Remus Lupin. This cloud informed Albus that not only had Remus tried to remove his jewelry, but that in doing so, he had paid the ultimate price. It was regretful, but the werewolf could be replaced so no real harm had been done. Albus set aside all thoughts of Remus Lupin and decided to take a nap before dinner; he may have been powerful, but everyone still needed to take the occasional break.

London Heathrow 1.15pm

At the airport the minutes seemed to take hours, almost as if time had been rendered immobile. Dudley thought that his mum was going to break his fingers; she had been clinging tightly to his hand ever since they had been ushered into the side room by airport security. Scarlett sat on Harry's lap, crying quietly, whilst her two sisters clung to each other, dry-eyed but silent. Dudley looked at Harry, who being white-faced, looked almost as bad as his mum. Dudley knew that Harry, having already lost two parents, would be devastated to have to lose

a third. Even though his parents had never told him or Harry that much about Harry's birth parents, they had both assured Harry that he had been loved very much.

At the sound of a knock everyone looked up. The door to their room slowly opened. Nia looked as if she was about to pass out. The head of the medical team stood framed in the doorway.

"Mrs. Lupin?" She asked, sounding sympathetic.

Nia stood up, her legs shaking uncontrollably. "I'm Nia, Remus' wife."

"I'm sorry, but we've done all we can for Mr. Lupin."

It was all too much for Nia, who burst in a flood of tears as she felt her world implode around her.

Filius' Home: 1.40pm

Filius arrived home from Minerva's to find the table in the dining room already set for the dinner party he was holding that night. Feeling a little out of sorts, Filius poured himself his second glass of Cognac that day, and headed to take a bath where he could sit and sort out his thoughts before his guests arrived later that night.

Filius' guests arrived on time, and were soon seated around the dining table enjoying a six course meal accompanied by fine wines. After they had finished eating, the group adjourned to the sitting room where they got down to business.

"Have you found out anything more about Dumbledore?" his superior asked.

"I could answer that question but the consequences would mean that you would be looking for another operative," the tiny man responded.

"I'm probably right in assuming then that you have found a contact who can provide you with information but has sworn you to an oath."

Flitwick didn't bother to grace the statement with a response. Under the conditions of the oath, he couldn't acknowledge that he had been speaking with anyone that day about Dumbledore.

"Let's just say that I'll leave you to follow your lead in whatever manner you see fit. Let me know when you have any information that you can pass on." His superior then let the matter drop.

The meeting then turned to matters other than Dumbledore, until it broke up just before midnight. After seeing his guests out, Flitwick checked his wards, bid his house elves goodnight and headed off to bed.

Disclaimer: None of its mine, although I wish it was. It all belongs to its owner.

Main relationships:

Remus Lupin, Petunia, Harry, Dudley & 3 siblings.

Lily Potter, her husband, Jamie Potter (the Boy Who Lived), and 3 siblings.

Alice Longbottom (widowed), mother of Neville and Seville (sorry I only realized about the rhyming aspect after I named her!).

Severus Snape is married to Virginie, mother of Hermione, Sebastian and Olivia.

Narcissa Black, mother of Draco (heir to the Black estate), divorced from Lucius Malfoy.

Lucius Malfoy married to Petronella Parkinson - his heir is now Matthias, their eldest child.

Molly Prewett (divorced from Arthur Weasley), lives with children Percy, Ron and Ginny.

Arthur Weasley married to Andromeda Tonks (widowed from Ted), children - Nymphadora, Bill, Charlie, Fred, George and Artie. His other 3 kids live with their mother, Molly.

This chapter is all Lupin family based, and compared to my previous chapters, is little bit longer.

Chapter 10: All Things Lupin

All five children rushed to comfort their mother who was now on her knees weeping copiously.

The head medic rushed to reassure the woman who had interrupted her speech, and now sat crying on the floor in front of her. "Mrs. Lupin. Please let me finish. When I said that we've done all that we can for

Mr. Lupin, I meant that we've done all we can for him here at the airport. He's on his way to Ashford Hospital."

Nia's tearstained face appeared above the mass of children who were currently surrounding her, "You mean Remus is alive?"

"Yes. We managed to stabilize him but he's still unconscious. If you want to come along with me, I'll arrange for you to be taken to the hospital. Is there anyone who can come and take care of the children?" The medic spoke quietly, but authoritatively.

Nia thought for a moment. She wanted to get to Remus' side as fast as possible, but she didn't want to leave her children on their own. She turned to the medic.

"Do you mind giving us a few minutes alone?" she asked politely.

"Of course not, I'll be outside." The medic slipped back out of the door and closed it behind her.

"Harry, I'm putting you in charge. I'm going to call Johanna Gregory and ask her to come over and collect you all. I will try and get back tonight, but if not, I'll call and ask Mrs. Figg to come round and stay with you, so that Johanna can leave." Nia's mind was working overtime, as she tried to sort everything out. "I'll ask security to recover our luggage. Most importantly, do not mention magic in front of anyone here at the airport. "

Harry hugged his mother and said, "Don't worry, we'll be fine. Just go and make sure that Dad is doing okay."

At that moment the medic returned to the room. "Mrs. Lupin, I'm sorry to intrude but I just wanted to tell you that a car has been arranged to take you to the hospital. It should be ready to go in about 15 minutes. Someone will collect you then. I'm afraid I have to get back on duty."

Nia smiled gratefully at the young woman. "Thank you so much for everything you've done for Remus."

The medic waived off Nia's thanks and left to return to duty.

The door then opened again revealing a representative from the airport. "Hello. You must be Mrs. Lupin." She shook hands with Nia. "I'm Bridgette Hanson. On behalf of Heathrow Airport, I would like to express our best wishes for your husband's speedy recovery.

Not giving Nia a chance to say anything, Bridgette continued talking. "As you already know, a car has been arranged to take you to the hospital. We will arrange for the retrieval your luggage. Is there anyone we can contact for you, someone who can come and collect the children?"

"I was going to call a friend to see if she can come and collect the children."

"Don't worry about that, we'll deal with it. Can you give me her details and I'll arrange for her to be contacted for you?"

Nia passed over Johanna Gregory's number, and Bridgette left the room. She returned a short time later.

"I've spoken to Miss Gregory and she said that she will set off now and will be here as soon as she can. Someone will be here shortly to take you to the hospital. The children will have to stay here but I will arrange for someone to stay with them until Miss Gregory arrives. I have also arranged for some soft drinks and sandwiches for the children." Bridgette finished her spiel and headed off out of the room.

The next few minutes passed by in a flurry; Nia was hustled out of the room after kissing her children goodbye, a security guard came in to sit with the children, and refreshments on a large trolley arrived to feed the now hungry children.

Nia Lupin followed the airport representative down to the car which, as soon as she was seated, sped off towards the hospital. On arrival she was told that her husband was still being examined by doctors, but that someone would be with her shortly. Nia wished her children were with her to distract her from her own dismal thoughts and the empty gnawing feeling that pervaded her stomach. She wouldn't be able to bear it if anything happened to Remus. Her deliberations were

interrupted when, after several hours, a tall, dark-haired man approached her.

“Mrs. Lupin?”

“Yes. How is my husband?”

“He is currently stable but has slipped into a coma. However, we don’t know why. We need to find out what triggered this episode. We’ve run numerous tests but can’t find any trace of what may have caused it.”

“Can I see him?”

“Of course. If you’d like to follow me, I’ll pass you on to someone who will direct you to his ward.”

Nia followed the doctor who left her with a receptionist who subsequently directed Nia towards Dickens ward. On entering the ward, she found her husband in a side room, close to the nurses’ station. They wanted to keep an eye on him in case of any change in his condition.

Remus looked awful. His face was paper white, making the scars he had there stand out even more than usual. Looking at his scars reminded Nia that the full moon was coming. They had originally agreed that Remus would portkey back to England and a safe location on the morning of the 21st, and then return to Florida on Christmas Eve. She wondered what would happen if he changed while he was still in a coma.

Nia pushed these thoughts aside and went to sit down in the chair next to her husband’s bed. She gently took his hand and stroked it while talking softly to him.

“Remus, I know I haven’t always been the best wife to you but I do love you so very much. I thought I’d lost you today when the medic came in and told me they’d done everything they could. I didn’t realize that she meant everything they could at the airport. I thought

you'd died and left me on my own. Please wake up. I need you. We need you."

Feeling exhausted, Nia put her head on Remus' hand and fell asleep. Remus meanwhile remained motionless in his comatose state.

Back at the airport the children were starting to feel bored by the time Johanna Gregory arrived to pick them up, so they were really happy to see her. It was at times like this that she was glad she still owned an estate car, and without too much fuss, all five children were soon buckled in and the luggage was stowed in the boot. With some of the luggage on the children's laps, it was a bit of a squeeze but they didn't care, they just wanted to go home. As Johanna turned the car in the direction of the exit to the airport, the children all vied to talk to her about what they had been doing since they had last seen her.

Johanna smiled in her rear view mirror as one by one, the children became quiet, as the drone of the engine lulled them to sleep. Johanna had known the children since just after the twins' birth. Nia had been unable to cope with four children, so Remus had taken on extra teaching duties in order to be able to afford to pay for some extra child care to help lighten Nia's load.

Eight years ago

Johanna Gregory was extremely well off and didn't need to work, so she generally kept herself occupied by doing volunteer work for local charities and foundations. It had only been by chance that she had seen the advertisement in the local newspaper asking for someone to help with light duties and to look after two small children. Deciding it was time for a change, she called the number listed and arranged to attend an interview the next day.

Johanna climbed out of her beloved Mini and stopped for a moment to look at the house, the address of which she had been given the previous day. No. 4 Privet Drive was one house set in a row of houses that all looked alike. The only thing that made this house stand out from the others was the brightly painted red door; all the others in the row were painted with a muted blue. She quickly walked up to the front door and rang the bell. As the door opened she was

greeted by a cacophony of sound. A harassed looking red-haired woman, holding a small wailing baby, stood in the doorway looking close to tears. Another baby was crying somewhere in the distance, and two small boys were standing on either side of the woman, holding onto her skirt with their rather pudgy hands.

“Hi. I’m Johanna Gregory. Here, let me take the little one from you.” Not giving the woman time to refuse, Johanna had swept in and taken the baby from her. From the not so charming smell that was emanating from the baby in her arms, Johanna concluded that the child needed changing. Spotting the changing table sitting next to a pile of diapers, Johanna quickly and efficiently removed the dirty diaper from the baby, cleaned her up and wrapped her in a fresh diaper. During the entirety of this time the woman who had opened the door hadn’t moved.

Johanna passed the baby back to her mother and, following the sound of the baby cries, headed upstairs to collect the other baby. She dealt with this baby in the same manner as she had dealt with her sister but this time she retained the hold she had on the baby. Johanna headed back downstairs where the woman had now recovered her composure and was just placing the first baby into a small crib which was standing in the middle of the lounge.

Johanna passed the second baby over to her mother and held out her hand, “Sorry, let’s start again. I’m Johanna Gregory and you must be Mrs. Lupin.”

Nia Lupin was at a loss for words. She had been trying to cope with two crying babies and her sons vying for her attention. The house had been a mess, and she had been aware that the woman, who she arranged to come for an interview, had been due at any moment. When she had opened the front door she hadn’t expected to see such a young woman, especially one who had promptly swept in and taken control of the situation.

“Yes, I’m Nia Lupin. I’m so sorry. You must think that I’m really awful.”

Johanna smiled and responded politely, “No, not at all.”

Nia invited Johanna to sit down. After moving the children's toys out of the way Johanna did so.

"If you don't mind my mentioning it, you look awfully young to be a nanny. Do you mind telling me why you want this job and a bit about yourself?"

"I've just turned twenty-three. I've been looking after children on and off for the past five years. For the last two years I've been working for charitable organizations, doing everything from ordering in baby food to painting walls. I have two degrees, one in history and one in archeology. I live just over five minutes away, and spotted your advertisement in the local paper. I have been looking for something different and decided to see exactly what the position entailed." Johanna rattled off her brief life history.

Nia was surprised to find that the girl was only three years younger than she was. She wouldn't have thought she was any older than eighteen. However, age notwithstanding, not many people would have stepped in to help without being asked.

"I just have a few more questions for you, Miss Gregory. Can you cook, do you mind doing a few light household chores, and when can you start?"

Johanna laughed. "Yes, I can cook basic food, nothing fancy though. I don't mind doing chores and I can start tomorrow. I have a copy of my references here for you to look at."

Johanna passed her references across to Nia who perfunctorily glanced over them. She didn't need references to tell her that she liked this girl.

"Let me tell you a little more about the job then..."

Present Time

Johanna's thoughts returned to the present as she drew up in front of No.4 Privet Drive. It had been many months since she had been here last. Now was not the time for those memories though. She woke the

children up; they had remained asleep after they had left London, and hustled them inside. She had spoken to Nia Lupin by phone, and assured her that she would stay overnight with the children. After she had unloaded the luggage, she made everyone hot chocolate. The twins didn't even manage to finish their drinks before they drifted back off to sleep. By ten o'clock all the children were in bed and Johanna was left alone with her memories.

Nine months earlier

Johanna had been very happy during the years that she worked for the Lupins. Now that the children were older, her duties consisted of little more than picking them up from school, and minding Scarlett after her mornings in kindergarten. Later that year, Scarlett would be joining infant school, her sisters starting junior school and the boys leaving to attend a boarding school. Johanna wondered whether it was time for her to move on. However, it wasn't just the lightening of her duties that made her question whether she should stay; it was her feelings for her friend's husband.

Johanna had seen very little of Remus Lupin in the first few years after she started working for the Lupins. His job as a supply teacher meant that he was often out of town, usually only returning on weekends, which she generally had off. It wasn't until just over a year ago, when Remus had finally decided to take a permanent job in the local school, that Johanna really got to know Nia's husband well. Remus had turned out to be knowledgeable and witty, something Johanna found extremely attractive in the opposite sex. There was also something otherworldly about him, that she couldn't quite place her finger on.

However, after thinking things through, Johanna decided that she would carry on working at the Lupins. Being a sensible woman, and not the type to pursue somebody else's husband, she pushed her feelings aside and tried, wherever possible, to avoid Remus Lupin. She loved her job and the children and didn't really want to leave. Everything went well for a few weeks until Nia had to go into hospital for a minor operation. Nia could have gone to St Mungo's but she didn't really trust wizarding hospitals.

“Are you sure you don’t mind staying with the children?” Nia asked as she carried her small overnight bag down the stairs. Nia had been upstairs checking that the magic suppressor they used when they had muggle visitors had been activated.

“Of course not.” Johanna smiled. “You’ll be back within a few days. If I have any problems, I have back-up I can call on.”

Remus came in from getting the car out of the garage. “I’m just going to drop Nia off and then I’ll return home. I was planning to pick up pizza on my way home. Is there any particular kind you like?”

Johanna felt her mouth go dry, “I thought you were staying at a hotel near the hospital.”

“That was the original plan. It turns out that one of Nia’s friends, Melanie, works at the hospital. As it is only a minor operation, Melanie has promised to keep an eye on Nia for me.”

Nia looked concerned. “I’m sorry. I must have forgotten to tell you that Remus wouldn’t have to stay near the hospital. He’s going to be grading exams all this weekend and he won’t be able to look after the children, which is why I needed you. It’s not a problem is it?”

Hurriedly pushing down her panic, Johanna rushed to reassure her friend and employer, “Of course not. I had planned to take the children out to see a movie tonight, that’s all.”

Remus turned to Johanna and said “I have a great idea. When I pick up the pizzas, why don’t I also get some popcorn and a couple of movies for the kids to watch? It’ll save you having to drag five children to the cinema. So which pizza is your favorite?”

Harry piped up “She likes mushrooms, onions and extra cheese.” The children had often shared pizzas with Johanna.

“Thanks, Harry. I think I’ll have sausage and bacon on mine. I’m feeling a little carnivorous tonight.” Remus grinned at the children who were now shouting their orders at their dad.

Johanna and the children waved as the Lupins got into the car and drove off. She then shepherded the children back indoors to finish their homework. She had threatened them with bed and no movie if they didn't get it done; needless to say all the children who had homework had it finished inside of an hour. They all then settled down in front of the TV to await their father's return.

To Johanna's relief, the pizza and movie evening went off without a hitch. One by one the children fell asleep and were carried off to their rooms by Remus. Johanna was going to be sleeping in the small guest room. When the children were smaller, the house had been remodeled so that it now had five bedrooms. Johanna still marveled about the fact that the house looked much bigger on the inside than it did from outside. When she had mentioned this to Nia, Nia had just smiled and raved on about the brilliance of her architect.

After depositing the last sleeping child in bed, Remus returned back downstairs, where he opened a bottle of red wine and popped in an old black and white movie, 'Pride & Prejudice' starring Greer Garson and Laurence Olivier. Initially Johanna felt uncomfortable, but after two glasses of wine, she began to relax and enjoy the movie. It was after midnight when the movie ended and Remus got up to clear away the paper plates. He hadn't wanted to wash dishes and so had brought home paper plates to eat the pizza off. When Johanna turned to help, Remus said that he had it all under control and sent her off to her room.

Remus watched as Johanna walked up the stairs. What had he been thinking?! Pizza, wine and an old movie. These were the kinds of wiles he normally employed to get the girls he slept with behind Nia's back into bed; not that they usually needed any encouragement. He was disgusted at himself that he had actually thought about seducing his children's nanny in such a manner. What made it worse was that his wife was currently lying in hospital waiting for her operation the next day. Throwing the plates in the trash, Remus growled in annoyance at himself and stomped off to bed.

The next day Johanna woke up late. She was so glad that she hadn't done anything stupid last night. Remus obviously wasn't interested in her; he had been a total gentleman. Of course he'd been a total

gentleman. His wife was in hospital, for goodness' sake. Berating herself at where her train of thought had been going, she got out of bed and headed for the shower. Thankfully the Lupins had managed to squeeze in a small en-suite bathroom for the use of any guests. Johanna wasn't sure she was ready to the face the world before she had showered.

After showering, she went downstairs to find the children all washed, dressed, fed and sitting watching cartoons in front of the TV. Harry informed her that Remus was in his study marking exams and wasn't to be disturbed unless it was an emergency. Deciding to take the children out of Remus' hair for the day, she wrote a note for Remus to let him know that they had gone out. She then piled the children into her estate car and headed for the zoo.

The children all had a great time at the zoo. Scarlett had been afraid in the snake house and so, after making sure that there was only one exit to the enclosure, she took Scarlett outside to await the other children. When they came out, Aurilia swore that Harry had been talking to a snake, but Johanna just laughed. She knew by now what active imaginations the children had.

At five o'clock the zoo closed and the little group headed out. Not wanting to cook, Johanna stopped off at McDonalds to pick up Happy Meals for the younger children and Big Mac meals for the boys. She then called ahead to her favorite Chinese restaurant to put in an order for her and Remus which she could collect on the way home. On arriving at the small shopping center where the Chinese restaurant was situated, Johanna told Dudley that she would only be five minutes and to keep an eye on the rest of the children. She quickly popped into Threshers where she picked up two bottles of red wine, ran into Blockbusters and grabbed a couple of movies, and then went into the Chinese restaurant to pay for her order which was waiting for her. She then dropped her purchases into the car trunk and headed home.

By the time they arrived home, the children were tired and had started squabbling. On hearing the noise, Remus came out of his study and took one look at the children, before ordering them to bed. He ignored the grumbling, knowing full well that it wouldn't be long

before they were all asleep. He turned to Johanna and said that he would be down after he had checked on the children.

Johanna used Remus' absence to set the dining table. She opened a bottle of the red wine, a fruity Cabernet, and set this beside the wine glasses she had taken from the glass cabinet. She then nipped upstairs, took a quick shower and changed out of her travel worn clothing, before dashing back down to the kitchen.

Moments later, Remus entered the kitchen and sniffed the air appreciatively. The smells of ginger chicken, mu shu pork and chow mein beckoned to his empty stomach. On looking at the various cartons, it appeared that Johanna had bought half the menu. She looked apologetically at Remus. "Sorry, I wasn't sure what you would like."

"I eat almost anything." Remus said, sitting down and starting to fill his plate.

"Wine?" Remus nodded affirmatively in response to Johanna's question, and took a mouthful of the fruity wine, swallowing appreciatively.

During dinner Johanna relayed the day's activities to Remus, who laughed at some of the children's antics. However, when she mentioned that Aurilia had said that Harry had been talking to a snake, Remus visibly stiffened. Misinterpreting Remus' response, Johanna hurried to assure Remus that all children made things up and that Aurilia would grow out of it as she got older. Plastering a fake smile on his face, Remus agreed with Johanna and let her change the subject.

"As you picked out the movie last night, I stopped off at Blockbusters and picked up a couple more for us to watch tonight; if that's okay with you."

"Of course. Let's go sit down and watch a movie then." Remus picked up the bottles of wine and fresh glasses, and headed into the lounge to sit down on the two seater sofa facing the TV screen.

Johanna felt her heart speed up a little when she realized that she would have to sit next to Remus to watch the movie. The only other chair facing the TV screen was piled high with laundry. It would seem rather churlish if she moved it to sit there when there was perfectly good spot next to Remus. She quickly popped the tape into the VCR player and settled down next to Remus to watch the movie. She had decided to avoid romance and had picked Star Wars, a science fiction movie, to watch. It was quite late by the time the credits rolled around and both bottles of wine were now empty.

Remus picked up the empty bottles and said that he was sure that they another bottle somewhere around, and disappeared off to get it. As Johanna sleepily took the tape out of the VCR and loaded her second choice of movie, she heard a loud crack coming from the direction of the kitchen. Popping her head around the corner, she saw that there was no-one there. That was strange, for one moment she could swear... She stopped that train of thought in its tracks. She had definitely had too much to drink. She returned to the lounge and sat down to wait for Remus to return. A few minutes later Remus came walking into the lounge carrying two bottles of red wine.

“Did you hear a cracking sound? I checked the kitchen but there was nothing there.”

Remus guessed that she must have heard him when he apparated out of the garden to buy some more wine. “You probably heard me dropping a glass. Sorry I took so long, with the children around, I needed to take it outside to the trash.”

Johanna just smiled and held up her glass for a refill. After sitting down, Remus started the second movie; it was one of his favorites, Indiana Jones. Since they had both seen the movie several times, they slipped into a genial conversation. However the relaxed mood disappeared the moment they both reached for the wine bottle and their hands touched.

Shivers raced up Remus’ spine as he covered Johanna’s hand with his own. She tried to pull free, but he held her hand in his own as he carried it towards his lips and placed a kiss in the center of her palm, and then released her. She moaned softly, making Remus want to

forget about self-control and throw her to the floor. Instead, he carefully took her wineglass out of her other hand. As he touched this hand he could feel her trembling. After feeling her shaking he wasn't sure if he wanted to go on; he couldn't cope with another frightened, frigid woman like his wife. He was soon, however, disabused of his notion.

Johanna couldn't believe it. When Remus had held her hand and kissed her palm, she thought she was going to die. Small tingles had started in the palm of her hand and rapidly spread out to encompass her entire body. She moaned, shaking with desire. She then felt Remus withdraw slightly. No, she wouldn't let him leave her like this. Instinct took over and she pressed her body against Remus trying to convey how much she actually wanted him.

Remus felt Johanna press her body into his; at that moment he felt relief and excitement flood through him, she wasn't shaking from fear but from need. Growling low in his throat, he stood up and swung her into his arms to take her upstairs to bed. At the top of the stairs, however, Remus stopped. He knew he couldn't use the master bedroom; it wouldn't be fair to Nia, and so he headed for the guest bedroom. Remus strode into the room and dropped Johanna on the bed. He then turned, locked the door and whispered a silencing spell which would allow sound in, but not out.

Remus turned around to look at Johanna who was now kneeling on the bed. He wanted to take things slowly with her, to make this night last forever, but he found he couldn't. He had wanted this woman for far too long. Finding out that she felt the same way empowered him in a way he hadn't felt in a long time. Striding across the room to stand in front of Johanna, Remus reached out, grasped the hem of her dress and pulled it over her head and dropped it onto the floor. He then stepped back and pulled off his shirt to reveal his lightly furred chest. He continued to undress until eventually he stood naked in the moonlight, which was streaming in through the open curtains.

Johanna lay back on the bed, clad only in her bra and panties watching Remus undress. It was at that moment she realized that when she had dressed for dinner that night, she had been dressing for Remus, in the hope that he would be the one taking her clothes off

at the end of the day. Not being one to disappoint a lady, Remus resumed the removal of her clothing, until she too was naked.

Remus lowered himself onto the bed and cupped Johanna's face between his hands and started to kiss her. His kisses were not gentle; they weren't meant to be tender and loving; they were meant to dominate, to incite, to arouse. As Remus' kisses became more and more demanding, he released Johanna's face to slide his hands down her body until he was cupping her bottom. Moaning deeply in her throat, Johanna arched into the pressure of his hands, only to have Remus use them to pull her hard against his body. Johanna didn't know if she was going to be able to control herself when Remus' mouth then left hers to start slowly kissing his way down her body. By the time Remus returned to her mouth, Johanna had lost all power over her actions and was frantically clawing at his back, moaning and urging him on.

Remus moved fully over Johanna, who gladly welcomed his weight. Remus then slowly slid into her warmth, only stopping when he encountered a barrier which prevented him from fully joining with her. The wolf in him experienced a moment of euphoria; she was untouched, and she was his. Remus felt Johanna tensing beneath him and he wished he could spare her the pain, but the wolf in him was crying out for completion. Remus gave into the pull of his instincts and pushed through the barrier, stifling Johanna's cry with his mouth. He then stilled for a moment to allow Johanna a little time to get used to the sensation. As Remus continued to kiss her, Johanna started to relax again and, as her excitement grew, she could feel a pressure slowly building in her body, and she started to move restlessly against Remus.

Remus, sensing she was ready, gradually began to move; tentatively at first, and then more quickly as he felt the tell-tale signs which indicated that Johanna was close to going over the edge. As the pair moved nearer to mutual completion, the wolf got closer and closer to the surface. If Johanna could have seen Remus' eyes, she would have noticed them changing from a light brown to a vivid amber. As Johanna trembled beneath him, Remus wanted to throw back his head and howl his triumph to the world. Instead, as he neared his

own completion, he buried his head into the crook of her neck. At the very moment of release, the wolf in Remus surged to the surface.

Johanna felt Remus' release rock through his body just as he bit down on her neck, sending shockwaves rippling through her. She immediately tried to escape from the painful sensation, but was held firmly in place by Remus' surprisingly strong grip. Unable to move away, Johanna lay submissively beneath him. She then felt Remus' tongue lapping at something that was trickling down her neck, and was surprised to feel her body reacting in response to the primal act, as she was overwhelmed by her second release of the night. This time, however, instead of screaming out her exhilaration, she bit deeply into Remus' shoulder, not knowing if she did it to mark him or to muffle her cries.

The next morning when she awoke, the bed was empty, and the floor bereft of Remus' clothing. After stripping the sheets off the bed, she headed for the shower. On seeing herself in the mirror she was shocked to see teeth marks marring the crook of her neck. She hazily remembered Remus biting her, but she hadn't thought that it had been that hard. Shaking her head, she continued to get ready.

Johanna left the bathroom, picked up the bedding and headed down to the kitchen to find it empty except for Harry, who smiled up at her as she came in. "Hi Johanna, Dad's gone to pick up Mum. The hospital called about an hour ago. The others have gone with him. I said that I'd stay and tell you where they'd gone."

At Harry's words, Johanna felt sick when she thought about Nia. How could she have done this to her friend? What made it worse was that she had absolutely no regrets about the previous night and, most damning of all, was the knowledge that she knew she would do it again if the opportunity arose. She excused herself and ran up to her room to pack her bags. She knew she couldn't stay here. Once Remus and Nia arrived home, she would leave. Heading back down to the kitchen, she loaded the washer, poured herself a cup of coffee and sat down to wait.

After two weeks of trying to avoid being alone with Remus, it became too much; Johanna handed in her notice and left. In leaving she

assured Nia that it was not anything she or the children had done but had more to do with the fact that the children no longer really needed her there full-time. She said that she had already been asked by several foundations to do charity work for them and that she had accepted. She had promised to keep in touch.

Present Day

Johanna had kept her word about keeping in touch by making the occasional phone call, but until today she hadn't been back to No.4; it had been too hard. Switching off the television, Johanna headed upstairs to bed. If it had been difficult coming back to No.4, it was even harder for her to enter the room where she and Remus had made love. Johanna went into the bathroom and slowly undressed in front of the mirror, catching sight of the bite that still stood out vividly on her neck. Not bothering to change into her nightclothes, she returned to the bedroom where she threw herself onto the bed and burst into tears. It was getting light by the time she finally fell asleep, murmuring Remus' name, wishing that he could hold her just one more time.

Daylight was beginning to break when Remus started to stir. It took him a few moments to find his bearings but he soon realized that he was lying in a hospital bed. The last thing he remembered was being in the airport and entering the scanner, followed by a blinding pain. No sooner had he finished this thought, when his head exploded with pain. Memory upon memory flooded into his mind. After a few seconds the pain subsided and Remus was left gasping for breath. He was tentatively reaching up to touch his ear when he noticed Nia sleeping peacefully in the armchair next to his bed.

"Oh God", Remus rasped out "What have I done?"

Remus got a reprieve. I couldn't do it. Sorry to Craig's girl who was happy when it looked as though Remus had bit the dust.

A big thank you to Aleisha Potter for letting me purloin the werewolf's love bite. Even though she has assured me that the original concept doesn't belong to her, it is the first time I have encountered it and so I

still wanted to give her credit for it. To the original creator of this idea, whoever you may be, thanks.

Chapter 11: Christmas and Beyond

December 19th

Harry awoke to the smell of bacon drifting up into the room he shared with Dudley, who was still asleep. As his sleep befuddled brain cleared, he suddenly remembered the events of the previous day. He wondered if his mum was home. Not bothering to get dressed, Harry quickly used the bathroom, and then rushed downstairs to the source of the smell, only to find Johanna, not his mum, at the stove cooking breakfast.

Johanna heard footsteps coming into the kitchen and turned to find Harry looking expectantly at her. "Good morning, Harry. Would you like some breakfast?"

Ignoring her question, Harry asked "Have you heard anything from Mum? Is Dad okay?"

Johanna smiled, "The answer to both questions is yes. I spoke to your Mum about twenty minutes ago. Your Dad woke up early this morning, and apart from a headache, he is going to be fine."

Johanna, however, wasn't being entirely truthful. She didn't tell Harry that Nia had said that Remus was suffering from a headache of Titanic proportions and that he was having problems remembering some things.

Looking more than a little relieved, Harry sat down at the table and Johanna served him breakfast. Harry noticed that it was his favorite, sausage, bacon and waffles with orange juice. He also noticed, as Johanna bent over the table to fix his plate, that she had what looked like a bite on her neck.

"Johanna, what have you done to your neck?" Harry gasped. It looked painful.

Johanna's hand immediately flew to her neck to cover the bite mark. "It's nothing; a neighbor's cat attacked me when I popped round to feed it. I don't think the cat is particularly fond of me."

“Wow,” Harry exclaimed, “that’s one mean cat.”

Johanna turned back to the stove to hide her expression from Harry. She also took the time to button up her blouse more securely. The bite, even though it had healed, still stood out in livid contrast to the rest of her skin. Her doctor had said that it looked as if the bite would scar. Her doctor, being more perceptive than an eleven year old, had also recognized that the bite had come from a human, not an animal. Johanna had made an excuse, blushed and the doctor had dropped the subject. She knew she could have gone elsewhere to get it checked, but she didn’t want to face her own fears. Her reverie was interrupted by the entrance of the rest of the Lupin brood, all eager for their breakfast.

The day moved swiftly on, and, after speaking to Nia again, Johanna found out that Remus was due to be released the next day. She just hoped that she could avoid seeing him. As it was, the minute Remus stepped foot over the threshold, Nia had unceremoniously bundled him up the stairs and into bed to lie back down. On coming back downstairs, Nia had walked up to her friend and hugged her.

“Thank you so much for looking after the children for me. I don’t know what I would have done without your help.” Nia was almost pathetic in her gratitude.

Feeling extremely uncomfortable, Johanna had brushed off her thanks. “It was no problem. Nia, I’m sorry, but I really must be making a move. I’m sure the children would love to see their Dad, and I’m only going to be in the way.”

“I totally understand. I’ve got so much to do myself. I need to repack.”

“Are you going somewhere?” Johanna was intrigued, despite her need to escape from the house.

“Yes, I’ve discussed it with Remus and we’ve decided that it would be unfair for the children to miss out on their trip to Florida.”

“Is Remus well enough to fly?” Johanna couldn’t believe that someone who had just left hospital would be up to taking a vacation so far away.

“No, but he’s asked me to take the children anyway. I’m going to arrange for a nurse to come in and take care of him for the next few days.” Nia smiled a little too brightly at Johanna.

Sighing inside, and knowing she would live to regret it, Johanna took a deep breath. “I’m doing nothing for Christmas. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“You’ve done enough already. I can’t ask you to put yourself out any more.” Nia looked torn. She wanted to spend Christmas with her children but she also didn’t want to leave her husband.

Johanna took the decision out of Nia’s hands. “I’ve never been to Florida. Why don’t I take the children and you stay here with Remus?”

Nia couldn’t believe that her friend would do this for her. “Are you sure? I don’t want you to feel you have to.”

“Of course I’m sure. I know you want to stay with Remus. Don’t worry I’ll take good care of the children. Now all I need is the flight details so I can get myself a ticket.”

“I’ll sort out the ticket for you. It’s the least we can do.” Nia exclaimed.

Knowing that the Lupins were not in the same league as she was monetarily speaking, Johanna refused to let Nia pay for her ticket. “No, I have plenty of money, and I will pay for my own ticket. I’m going to be having a wonderful time, while you are stuck here with the invalid.”

Nia decided to give in gracefully. “Thank you. Now let me sort out the flight details for you. Let me see...”

December 21st

Nia pulled up in front of the Lupin house. It was still dark outside and very chilly. Their flight was due to take off later that morning and she wanted to get to the airport early and get checked in. Taking a deep breath, she got out of her car, and walked up the path. Before she had even reached the front door, it swung open to reveal the excited faces of Harry and Scarlett. Ten minutes later all five children were strapped in, the luggage loaded (thankfully a lot less than the previous time), and Johanna was having a last word with Nia.

"I'll phone you once we've checked in at the hotel. It may be late though."

"That's fine. I'll be waiting for your call." Nia looked as if she wanted to cry. "Look after my babies."

Johanna drew the woman into a hug. "I'll guard them with my life. Don't worry. They'll have a great time."

Even though the children couldn't hear the conversation, the elder ones had guessed at its content, and they started to cheer and wave in an effort to cheer their mother up. Nia smiled bravely and waved back at the children. She then turned and headed inside, before she changed her mind and stopped them from going.

Johanna turned to get into the car. As she did so, she could have sworn that she was being watched. She continued to get into the car, ignoring the feeling and refusing to look up at the house. Smoothly she put the car into gear and drove away from the curb, the children still waving madly.

On arriving at the airport, Johanna found a porter who took their luggage into the terminal. Johanna knew that Nia had been booked into economy class on the plane. There was no way she was flying like that! She quickly headed to the airline's ticket desk, and without too much ado, all six tickets had been changed to first class, which thankfully been empty enough to do so on both the outward and return journeys.

First class check-in, as usual, was completely empty in contrast to economy check-in which was full to the brim with sleepy looking

families standing in what looked like a never-ending line. Within five minutes, they had checked in and were on their way to the first class lounge to await their flight. Johanna made a few stops en-route to make sure that the children had everything they needed to keep them occupied during the flight. She also made a stop to pick up some Dramamine for the flight just in case any of the children, who had never flown before, felt sick. Four hours later, all six were strapped in their seats and on their way for a week of fun.

December 25th

Christmas morning dawned bright and chilly. Hermione, who had been hoping for snow, felt a little disappointed when she pulled back her curtains to let the daylight in, only to find the ground covered in frost. On checking her clock, Hermione realized she had slept in late; it was nearly eight o'clock and breakfast would be served at eight-thirty, as it always was on Christmas day. Deciding that she had better get a move on, she dashed into the bathroom to get washed and ready. She would be willing to bet that Livvy and Bas would be up already clamoring for their gifts.

On entering the breakfast room, Hermione was surprised to find her mother absent, and her father watching over her siblings.

"Good morning, Papa, Merry Christmas." Hermione greeted him, even though she knew that her father hated Christmas; she just didn't know why.

"Good morning, Hermione." As expected, Severus did not return the festive greeting. "Your mother will be joining us shortly."

Just before breakfast was due to be served, Virginie entered the breakfast room, looking a little pale. Severus immediately moved to her side, and they exchanged a few whispered words.

"Children", Severus said, taking hold of Virginie's hand, "we have something important to tell you."

Hermione held her breath; she was frightened that something was wrong with her mother.

Severus smiled indulgently at his wife, and then turned his gaze back to the children, "We're going to have a baby."

Hermione let out her breath in relief, and rushed over to hug her parents to offer her congratulations. Her actions were copied by her siblings.

Salty appeared to say that breakfast would be served momentarily, and so the family moved to sit down at the table. Once they had all finished eating, they moved into the great room which had been decorated in silver and white, Virginie's favorite colors, to open their presents. Severus and Virginie made a point of not spending lavish amounts of money on expensive presents in deference to Severus' past.

The youngest always opened their presents first, so Olivia, who by now was beyond excited, got to go first. Her parents had bought her an easel, some paints and a sketch book; she loved to draw and paint so they had finally decided she was old enough to have her own supplies, rather than the nursery supplied ones. Hermione and Bas had bought her some pencils and blank canvases.

Bas, who was quidditch mad, was delighted with his gifts of a training snitch, trading cards and a team jersey. His sisters had bought him a year's subscription to his favorite magazine, Junior Quidditch Monthly.

At last it was Hermione's turn. She had been hoping for an upgraded potions kit, and she hadn't been disappointed. Her parents had also gifted her with a certificate for the Magical Menagerie. Bas and Livvy had bought her some sugar quills; she got through them at an astounding rate. She also received gifts from her school friends; a leather diary and Never Out Quill from Harry and Dudley, a magical crystal from Neville which reflected her moods, a potions text she hadn't been able to find anywhere from the Weasley twins (she did wonder how they had been able to obtain something even her father hadn't been able to get), a friendship bracelet from Daphne, a new bookmark from Dean and, finally, earrings from Su Li and Padma.

Her parents always exchanged their gifts privately and this year was no different. The children had bought their parents a photo frame and had placed a picture of themselves in it.

Hermione was having a wonderful day until she overheard her parents talking in her father's study. She had gone to ask her father if she could borrow a potions text she had been interested in reading. The two younger children had fallen asleep, having both been awake since the early hours of the morning.

"Oh, Severus. I'm so happy, I could cry. I can't wait to have this little one." Virginie was almost glowing.

Severus thought he had never seen Virginie looking so beautiful. "I can't wait either. I can remember when you gave birth to Bas and Livvy. I couldn't wait to be allowed into your room to see them."

In the wizarding world, birthing, as compared to modern muggle standards, was somewhat stuck in the Victorian era. Men were not allowed inside the birthing room until the women had given birth, been cleaned up and the babies checked and dressed. Both being purebloods, Virginie and Severus, had adhered to these traditions. Even though Severus wouldn't ever admit it, he was glad he hadn't had to see or hear his wife go through the pain of labor. For each birth he had actually left the house and sat in the garden until the midwife had come to tell him that it was all over, and that his new child had arrived.

Listening outside the door, Hermione wondered why her father hadn't mentioned her. Her mother's words soon filled her in, "I'm just sorry that you didn't have the same opportunity with Hermione."

"So am I. I wish with all my heart that she had been mine..."

Hermione didn't stop to hear what else her father, no, Severus, had to say. She couldn't call him her father now; she wasn't his. Hermione managed to hold her tears in until she reached the shelter of her room. There she wept until she could cry no more. Exhausted she fell asleep. She was woken by Salty telling her it was time for dinner. Hermione didn't really want to go down to dinner but knew her mother

would know that something was wrong if she didn't. Entering the bathroom, she hurriedly washed her face, which fortunately no longer showed any signs of her crying spell.

During dinner Hermione picked at her food and said very little. Virginie and Severus exchanged a look; Virginie then got up. "Bas, Olivia, it's time for bed."

The two children whined at her order. "I am also going to bed. I'm feeling a little fatigued. Now come along, say goodnight to your father and sister."

Knowing that they weren't going to win, both children bid goodnight and followed their mother out of the door.

Severus turned to Hermione. "Is everything okay?"

Hermione's "Yes, Sir" lacked any conviction, and she refused to meet Severus' eyes.

"Hermione", Severus spoke softly to his daughter "I know there's something wrong."

"I'm just a little tired. I didn't sleep very well last night."

Severus knew she was lying; she wouldn't look at him and she was calling him "Sir"; something she only did when she was being reprimanded. "I know something is wrong, please tell me."

"Really, I'm just tired. I think I'll go to bed, if you'll excuse me." Hermione turned to head towards the door but was stopped by Severus' hand on her shoulder.

Severus turned Hermione around to face him. His patience was starting to ebb. He knew something was wrong but he couldn't understand why she wouldn't tell him.

"Hermione Snape, I know you are lying. Something is wrong and I expect an explanation right now." Severus snapped out, his words sounding harsher than he had intended.

Severus immediately felt contrite when Hermione's face crumpled and she burst into noisy tears. Even though he had been married for some time, and had two daughters, Severus still felt uncomfortable when it came to dealing with crying females. He took a step forward to comfort Hermione and was surprised when she moved backwards to avoid contact. Her weeping got louder.

Making sure that he didn't touch her, Severus bent down on one knee and looked at Hermione, "Please tell me what is wrong. I can't help you if you won't tell me."

By now Hermione had worked herself into a pitiful state, and her cries were resonating through the house. Severus, not knowing what to do, decided that a calming potion was in order. He left the poor girl standing in the middle of the room and headed off to his study. He returned in time to see Hermione, having worked herself up to even greater heights of distress, being sick on the floor. He was about to go to her to give her the potion when Virginie stormed in. Taking one look at her daughter, she gave Severus a look that would have made most men wilt, and Severus was no exception, and gathered her daughter into her arms. Severus, deciding discretion was the better part of valor, kept quiet and cleaned up Hermione's mess while her mother tried to calm her down.

Hermione wasn't calming down and Virginie's temper flared even higher. She turned on her husband, "What exactly did you say to upset her like this?"

"Nothing, I..." Severus' explanation was cut off as Virginie continued her tirade against him.

"Nothing. Nothing. It doesn't look like nothing to me." She snapped at Severus, before returning her attention to her daughter. "There, there, baby, Mama's here. Shh. Everything's going to be alright."

Responding to her mother's gentle voice and reassuring words, Hermione's sobs abated a little but did not stop. Seeing the purple filled vial in Severus' hand, Virginie put out her hand for it. On receiving it she turned back to her daughter and gently coaxed her

into taking it. She then led Hermione over to the large sofa behind the dining table and sat down with her. She held her daughter until her sobs had abated somewhat.

"Now do you want to tell me what's wrong?" Virginie continued to speak softly to her daughter.

Severus stood back and listened but all he could make out were the words "baby" "love" and "papa". He watched Virginie talk quietly to Hermione before she left her daughter and approached Severus to draw him aside to where she could talk privately with him.

"Severus, I'm going to leave Hermione with you now. I'm sorry I screamed at you but I thought you had done something to her. Please don't take this the wrong way but you need to be gentle with her." Severus opened his mouth to interrupt his wife but she put a finger to his lips to stop him. "She needs to know how much you love her. Now I'm going to leave the two of you together. I love you."

Virginie then kissed Severus on the lips and left the room. Severus tentatively sat down by Hermione, and waited for her to say something. Even now, with the calming potion doing its job, Hermione was still upset, and having trouble in getting her words out. When she finally did, Severus felt his heart go out to his daughter.

"I'm really sorry. I didn't mean to listen but I heard you and..." Hermione stopped to stifle a sob that threatened to escape.

Severus urged her on, "Please continue, I won't be angry."

Hermione took a deep breath "I heard you and Mama talking about how you were looking forward to the new baby, and how excited you were when Bas and Olivia had arrived.

At this point Hermione started to cry again. Severus didn't need to hear any more. He already knew what else she had overheard. Hoping she wouldn't resist, Severus reached over and drew Hermione onto his lap so that she was nestled in his arms.

"I'm so sorry you had to find out like that. Your mother and I were going to tell you when you returned from school at the end of the year. We didn't want to spoil your Christmas by telling you now."

Hermione said nothing and just hid her face in her father's shoulder, unable to face him.

"Honey Bear please look at me." Severus begged, using Hermione's baby name; the one she secretly loved him using.

Hearing her father call her Honey Bear nearly undid Hermione, as she reluctantly lifted her head to face him.

"I can remember when I first saw you; you were so small and defenseless, hugging a teddy bear. I think I fell in love with you at that exact moment. I love you exactly the same as I love Bas or Livvy or the new baby."

"But I'm not really your daughter." Hermione said, looking totally crestfallen.

"Hermione, your mother and I also had something else we were going to tell you at the end of the year. You are the Snape heir." Severus had made Hermione his heir on the same day he married Virginie.

At first Hermione was speechless, then her natural curiosity took over once she had gotten over her shock "But you can't do that. I'm not a boy and I'm not a Snape by blood."

"The Snape line has never passed male to male. If a female was the eldest child, then she would automatically inherit." Undecided as to whether to tell her any more, Severus hesitated.

"But I am not a Snape by blood and therefore I can't inherit." Hermione's logic was flawless, almost.

Sighing heavily, Severus knew he would have to be totally honest. "Hermione, you are a Snape by blood."

Hermione frowned, "But..."

Severus interrupted her, "I adopted you on the day I married your mother. Not only did I adopt you in name, but also in blood."

Hermione gasped. She knew blood rituals were generally forbidden by law.

Severus continued, "Your mother and I agreed to carry out the blood ritual. The day of our marriage was the only day that it was permissible for the ritual to be carried out by law. Before you say anything, I wasn't forced to do it. Your mother spent a long time discussing it with me to make sure I wouldn't regret my choice. I knew I would never regret my choice. As far as I am concerned, Honey Bear, you are my first born, and I will always love you."

Hermione burst into tears again and buried her head into her father's shoulder whispering "I love you too, Papa."

She stayed that way until she fell asleep. Severus got up, lifting his daughter with him and carried her to her room. Once there, he placed her in her bed and called for Bright, the house elf who had watched over Hermione when she was younger.

"Yes, Master, sir?" the elf bowed low.

"Please watch over Miss Hermione tonight. Call me immediately if she awakes during the night. Do you understand?"

"Bright look after Missy Hermione."

Satisfied that the elf would take care of Hermione, Severus headed for the room he shared with his wife. On entering, he noticed his wife was already asleep. Sighing he sat down on the chaise longue in front of the fireplace. He felt emotionally and mentally exhausted. Severus knew he wasn't a sentimental kind of man and had found it difficult to express to Hermione how he really felt about her.

Life had been so much easier when he hadn't had to worry about anyone except for himself. He also knew that his life had been empty of any joy and warmth until his wife and children had come into it.

Rising from the chaise, Severus undressed and slipped beneath the covers to join his wife. Looking down at her sleeping face, he smiled contentedly, and settled down to sleep.

January 2nd

Ron had had a great Christmas. Jamie's family had made him feel really welcome. On Christmas Day, Ron had woken up and had been hesitant about joining the family downstairs around the tree to open presents. Lily had immediately put a stop to that by fetching him and drawing him in to sit by her. Not only had Ron received new robes, quidditch gloves, and a Chudley Cannons tee-shirt from his own family, but he had also received the latest chess set on the market, the limited edition Knight25, from Jamie's parents. Both boys had bought each other a selection of sweets ordered in from Honeydukes in Hogsmeade.

Jamie had received many lavish gifts from his parents, but the one that meant the most to him was his new broom, the Nimbus 2000. Unfortunately, he hadn't had much chance to try it out, as the weather had turned rainy after Christmas day. Most of his gifts were now stuffed into his trunk. He was a little despondent that he couldn't take his new broomstick back to school, no matter how much he had begged his mother.

The boys had intended to look for information on Nicholas Flamel over the Christmas holiday but with parties to attend and games to play, Flamel had been neglected in favor of having fun. Now it was too late, they were all packed and due to return to Hogwarts that same morning. The boys were checking that they had everything to take back when a knock at the door interrupted them. Lily put her head around the door and asked if they were ready to go.

"Is Dad coming with us?" Jamie almost worshipped his father and wanted to spend as much time as he could with him.

Lily shook her head "Sorry, he's waiting downstairs to say goodbye. There's been an emergency at the hospital and he needs to leave in a few minutes."

Jamie pushed past his mother in a hurry to reach his father before he left. Lily and Ron followed at a slightly more sedate pace. By the time they reached the bottom of the stairs, Jamie was alone.

“Are you boys ready then?” Lily asked.

Jamie nodded, excited to be going back to school. He had already said goodbye to his brother and sisters. He turned and headed into the room they used for flooing, with Lily and Ron following up the rear.

Nia stood on the train platform and hugged both boys. “Take care and I’ll see you both at Easter.”

“We’ll miss you. Tell Dad I’ll write to him”, Harry hugged his mother hard.

“Yeah, and me.” Dudley pushed Harry aside so that he could hug his mother as well.

Their sisters had already said goodbye to the boys as they had started back at school that morning. Nia watched as the boys boarded the train, and she turned to head back to the barrier. As she did so, she saw two boys, one brunette and one red-headed, come out of the floo entrance; they were followed by a woman Nia recognized, even after all this time. She had sworn when she adopted Harry that she would have nothing more to do with that woman, and heading out of the barrier, she intended to keep that promise. Lily Potter meant nothing to her anymore.

The train arrived safely and the children were soon all seated for the welcome back feast. Harry and Dudley chatted happily to their friends in Ravenclaw. They hadn’t had a chance to speak to Hermione or the Gryffindors, but they had waved at them as they passed their tables. Dinner had been almost over when Harry collapsed over the table. When he came to, Dudley was leaning over him.

“Harry, Harry, are you okay?” Dudley sounded almost frantic.

“Give me a minute” Harry managed to groan out.

Professor Flitwick had, by now, made his way over to the Ravenclaw table, closely followed by Professor Dumbledore. "Mr. Lupin, I think you should go to the hospital wing."

"But I'm fine, Sir." Harry said, even though that was not the case.

"That may be so, but I still want Madam Pomfrey to take a look at you."

Dudley interrupted the conversation. "Don't worry, Sir, I'll take him."

Dudley gently helped Harry up. "Come on, Harry, let's go."

Harry was supported out of the Great Hall by his brother's arm around his waist. He could see Potter and Prewett sniggering and saying something about him being a fainting girl. Harry felt too ill to care.

After what seemed to take forever, the boys arrived at the hospital wing, where they were met by Madam Pomfrey. "Mr. Lupin, whatever has happened to you. One day and you are already in the hospital wing."

Harry had had to see the matron several times already; once for slipping and cutting his head open, and another time when he fell off his broom. It wasn't that he was a bad flyer; it was just that the broom had had a mind of its own. Dudley, knowing that Harry would try to gloss over what had happened, jumped in before Harry could say anything, "He fainted into his dinner."

"Honestly, I feel fine now", Harry grumbled.

He really hated hospitals. When he was five he had had to spend several days in hospital for concussion. Hating the idea of wizarding hospitals, Nia had taken him to a muggle one. He had hated every minute of it. Only the fact that Remus had stayed with Harry, had made things bearable.

Madam Pomfrey would brook no refusal from Harry. “Mr. Lupin, I will determine whether you are fine or not. Now come sit on the bed for me, and I’ll see what’s wrong.”

As Harry hopped onto the bed and removed his robe, it quickly became apparent what was wrong; his back was soaked in blood. Harry realized that the tugging he felt in his shoulder when he had tried to move his trunk to put his robes on, had been his stitches coming out.

Madam Pomfrey waved her wand over Harry and then tutted a little. Spotting a large gash, she quickly cleaned and sealed it, and then left to get some potions. After checking her office for a blood-replenishing potion, she remembered that she had forgotten to ask Severus to bring some up.

“Dudley, please stay with your brother until I return. I’ve just going to pop out and get a few potions.” She then bustled out of the ward.

As she bustled out, Dumbledore swept in and up to the two boys. “Mr. Lupin, I will watch over your brother until Madam Pomfrey returns.”

Not wishing to argue with the headmaster, Dudley bid his brother goodnight and left.

By now Harry was starting to feel sick, and just as Dumbledore turned to him with a concerned “Harry” on the tip of his tongue, Harry threw up, all over Dumbledore’s silver moon encrusted, purple robes.

“Sorry, Sir” Harry said quietly as he practically collapsed onto the bed.

Dumbledore quickly took care of the mess and turned back to the boy, who was now lying flat out on the bed, and jovially said “It’s not a problem, I need a new set anyway.” Inwardly he was cursing; cleaning spells tended to get rid of the stains, but not always the smells.

Taking a seat at the foot of the bed, Dumbledore launched into the real reason he had come to the hospital wing. When he had seen

Harry collapse at the feast, he wondered if it had had something to do with Remus' death.

"Now then, my boy, what have you been doing to yourself?" he asked in a caring tone, his eyes twinkling; all of which were wasted on Harry who just lay there with his eyes closed.

Realizing that the headmaster was waiting, Harry hoped that if he told him, he'd go away "I fell off a climbing frame on holiday in Florida and cut open my shoulder. I had to go to hospital and have stitches."

"Why didn't your father fix it for you?" Dumbledore waited, expecting the boy to launch into a story about his father's death.

"He wasn't there. We were with our old nanny, Johanna Gregory." Harry replied.

"Why didn't she fix it then?" Dumbledore enquired.

"She's a muggle." By now, Harry was feeling really dreadful and just wanted to go to sleep.

"Where was your father?" Dumbledore pressed.

"He was at home. He had an accident at the airport, when we were first going to fly out. He had to go to hospital."

"What happened to him?" By now, Dumbledore was starting to feel a little alarmed.

"He collapsed and died. They don't know why. The medics managed to revive him." Harry was hoping that Madam Pomfrey would return quickly; Dumbledore's questions were like little darts piercing his consciousness, when all he wanted to do was to slip into the abyss and go to sleep.

"How is he now?" Dumbledore asked, hoping to get a definitive answer, before Madam Pomfrey returned to interrupt his questioning.

“He’s resting but he can’t remember some things.” Harry could have cried with relief, as Madam Pomfrey pushed open the door to the ward and rushed up to her patient.

“Thank you for keeping Harry company, Professor Dumbledore, but I need to get these potions into him now.” Madam Pomfrey was quite brisk.

Understanding that he had been dismissed, Dumbledore headed out of the ward. As he left, he heard Madam Pomfrey chiding Harry to make sure he swallowed the entire blood-replenishing potion, before the door swung shut behind him. Dumbledore reached his office and sat down. He took a sherbet lemon and, lost in thought, started to suck on it. He had been surprised to hear that the werewolf wasn’t dead. Somehow he must have managed to remove his earring and survive. Dumbledore decided he needed to make a house call on Remus Lupin, and find out what was going on.

The next day, after telling Minerva at breakfast that he had an appointment at the Ministry, Dumbledore flooed out of Hogwarts. Flitwick, who had been seated next to Minerva, couldn’t help but overhear their conversation. He had only checked with Paddington, his supervisor, last night as to Dumbledore’s Ministry movements. As far as Paddington had known, Dumbledore had no meetings at the Ministry until the end of next week. Making a note of this, Flitwick resumed eating his breakfast.

Dumbledore arrived in an alleyway close to Privet Drive. He was soon standing at the red front door of No. 4 ringing the bell. He was surprised when Lupin answered the door himself.

“Albus, what can I do for you? Are the boys alright?” Remus thought for one moment that something had happened.

“Remus, may I come in? Albus smiled politely. “I assure you that both of the boys are fine.”

Remus stepped aside for Albus to enter. After an encounter with a vampire, Remus knew better than to invite somebody in vocally. As

Dumbledore stepped into the house, Remus brought up his occlumency shields. Thankfully Petunia was out shopping.

Remus indicated that Dumbledore should sit down and went to make some tea. Dumbledore had just accepted a cup, when they were interrupted by Scarlett, who was off sick from school. "Daddy, I feel cold."

Remus strode across the room and picked up his daughter. She immediately snuggled into his body heat, and he settled himself into a chair to face Dumbledore.

"So what I can do for you?" Remus repeated his earlier question.

"Young Harry had to pay a visit to the hospital ward last night." Seeing Remus about to interrupt him, Dumbledore held up his hand to stop him. "He is fine. The cut he received on holiday had reopened. Madam Pomfrey had him fixed up and kept him in overnight just to make sure that everything was okay. Harry told me that you had an accident on your way to catch a plane."

"So I'm told." Remus responded wryly.

"You don't remember? Harry mentioned something about your memory."

"The last thing I remember before the accident was walking through the airport, and the next thing I knew I awoke in a hospital bed. Apparently I had some sort of fit or stroke, and died. It was only because of the medical team's efforts that I survived."

As he finished speaking, Remus turned his head to check on Scarlett, who had now fallen asleep. As he did so, Dumbledore spotted Remus' earring, still firmly affixed in his left ear. Dumbledore relaxed. His monitor must have registered the fact that Remus had died, even though it was only for a few minutes; not that he had attempted to take his earring out. Dumbledore had layered the earring with compulsion and repelling spells, so that no-one would attempt to take the earring out, and it looked as if these were still in place. As Remus

turned back to look at Dumbledore, Dumbledore slipped into Remus' mind. It looked like a war-torn minefield, full of huge craters. Satisfied, Dumbledore slipped back out and, having accomplished his goal, Dumbledore took his leave and returned to school. He had plans to make for young Mr. Potter.

Remus dropped his shields and let the image in his mind fade. He decided to take his daughter back to her room and pop her into bed. He had just done this and gone into his room, when he heard Nia come in the front door. Still unable to face his wife, Remus hurried to lie down.

"Remus, are you awake?" Nia opened the bedroom door.

Remus responded in a sleepy voice, "Yes, but I've just had Albus Dumbledore visit, and I feel exhausted after dealing with him. I thought I'd take a nap."

"I'll let you get some sleep then." Nia disappeared from the room and closed the door.

Remus lay on the bed thinking about the day he had awoken in the hospital, and about the blanks in his memory that had come flooding back into his mind.

December 19th

Just after Remus had regained consciousness, he had been bombarded by a flood of memories; lost memories, altered memories, memories he would have rather kept buried. He realized that he couldn't feel his earring and, as he had tentatively reached up to check his ear, he had noticed Nia asleep in the armchair next to his bed. He remembered crying out, disturbing Nia in her sleep. She had immediately noticed he was awake and hadn't been able to contain her tears of joy. As she had touched his hand, Remus hadn't been able to help himself, he had pulled his hand away. Seeing her hurt look, Remus had fallen back onto his pillow and closed his eyes, pretending to go back to sleep. On waking later in the day, he acted as if he didn't remember waking up earlier.

When Nia had come in to visit that night and leaned over to kiss him, it had taken all of his willpower not to push her away from him. They had talked quietly about the holiday and he had managed to persuade her to take the children, claiming that he would be just fine on his own. He really needed some space and hoped that his family's absence would gain him some. His plan backfired, however, when Johanna Gregory had stepped in to take the children, leaving him to deal with Nia alone.

December 21st

Sighing Remus watched from his bedroom window as his children got into the car. He then watched the two women standing under the streetlight; the one he wanted but couldn't have, and the other he had, but didn't want. He was almost thankful that it was a full moon that night. He could lose himself in the wolf and be able to forget for a short time. Not bothering to wait for his wife to return to the house, he apparated out to the Shrieking Shack. With Harry being in the house, Dumbledore had given him permission once again to spend the full moons there.

Once in the shack, Remus sat down on the floor, and thought back to the day he had asked Nia to marry him; the day Dumbledore had played God; the day that never should have happened.

Chapter 12: Exploration and Discovery

THE PAST

December 21st 1991

No, he refused to think about how he was forced into marriage. However, no matter how hard he tried, Remus couldn't avoid thinking about how Dumbledore had first ensnared him in his web of deceit.

March 1st 1970

Remus had once never been as grateful to anyone as he had been to Dumbledore. Even though he was a wizard and had been enrolled to attend Hogwarts from a very young age, he knew that his "handicap" might have prevented his attendance. However, after speaking to Professor Dumbledore, Remus' parents had been delighted when their son was accepted to Hogwarts. Dumbledore had assured the Lupins that as long as Remus was circumspect, no other parents would need to know of their son's condition. He also arranged for a building to be erected to provide a secure location in which Remus could transform. From the outside, the building looked like a rickety wooden shack with nailed up wooden planks covering the windows, but inside it was reinforced with magic which would prevent Remus from escaping. A Whomping Willow guarded the entrance to the tunnel to the building, and was planted as a deterrent to those who might accidentally stumble across the tunnel's entrance.

September 9th 1975

The years passed and all had been well until on the night of the full moon, Sirius Black had lured Severus Snape into the tunnel which led to the building now known as the Shrieking Shack. Only James Potter's quick actions had prevented a tragedy from occurring. As a consequence therefore, upon the reversal of his transformation, instead of going to the hospital wing to recover, Remus had had to drag his bitten and scratch strewn body up to the Headmaster's office. Upon entering he had been surprised to see Severus Snape sitting on a chair close to the Headmaster's desk. It looked as if they had been awaiting his arrival.

"Mr. Lupin, please take a seat", Dumbledore invited with a slightly reserved smile.

Remus gratefully collapsed into the seat. He looked expectantly at the headmaster.

"You may be wondering why I asked you to come straight here, instead of attending the hospital wing after your transformation." Remus nodded, noticing that Dumbledore's face had now lost its smile. "Unfortunately last night you came close to attacking someone. It was only because of the quick thinking of James Potter that a possible catastrophe was averted."

Remus was horrified. Not only had he nearly attacked someone but it appeared that Severus Snape, the slimy Slytherin, now knew his secret. Swallowing hard he asked, "What happened?"

At this point Severus could keep quiet no longer. "Your wonderful Gryffindor friend Black tricked me into entering the tunnel to the Shrieking Shack where you were waiting. You nearly killed me."

Remus leapt up, wincing as he did so, "I didn't mean to. I didn't know." Remus was by now, quite understandably close to tears.

"Boys," Dumbledore intervened. "You will both please sit down and we will discuss this like the civilized people we are."

Severus snarled. "He's hardly civilized" "He's a werewolf. He's little more than an animal."

Remus knew Severus was right. He was an animal. He hung his head in shame and let the tears trickle slowly down his cheeks.

Dumbledore turned on Severus. "Mr. Snape, you will sit down and say nothing until I ask you to. Do you understand?"

Realizing that the Headmaster was not to be trifled with, Severus did as he was told.

Dumbledore turned to Remus. "Mr. Lupin, I need to know whether you knew about this plan of Mr. Black's."

Remus lifted his tear-filled eyes to meet Dumbledore's and just shook his head. Dumbledore quickly discerned that Remus was telling the truth and turned to Severus. "I believe Mr. Lupin is an innocent party in this matter. You will therefore say nothing about his condition."

"But you can't let a werewolf stay in the school. He's already tried to kill me once. He needs to be expelled." Severus felt panic rising inside him like a tidal wave at the thought of Lupin still being able to stay in school.

"I want you to swear to me that you will say nothing of Mr. Lupin's condition while you both attend this school." Dumbledore said in a tone that countenanced no argument from Severus.

Unwillingly, Severus swore that he would never mention Lupin's affliction while they both attended Hogwarts. A sickly yellow light emanated from his wand to affirm his vow.

"Thank you, Mr. Snape." Dumbledore then turned to Remus. "If you will excuse me for a moment, I need to speak to Mr. Snape alone. Please come back in when he leaves."

Once Remus had left them alone, Dumbledore turned to Severus. "I'm sorry to have to put you in a position where you have to face Mr. Lupin again, but he is an innocent party in this escapade. I cannot act against him. However, if in the future you ever need anything, please don't hesitate to come to me, and I will do everything I can to help you."

Feeling somewhat placated, Severus thanked the Headmaster and left to return to his dormitory. Dumbledore hoped that Severus would need him; he would certainly be able to use Severus in his group.

When Remus came back in, Dumbledore turned to speak to him. "I am satisfied that you had nothing to do with this incident. However, I would appreciate it if you told no-one else of your problem and where you spend your nights."

“Yes, Sir” Remus mumbled.

“Thank you. Now, I have something important I wish to discuss with you before I release you to Matron’s tender care. What is discussed here today must remain a secret and I need your oath to that effect.” Seeing Remus about to swear an oath, Dumbledore held up his hand to halt him. “Not now. We will deal with that later.”

Remus wondered what was so important that he needed to swear an oath. “What is it you want to discuss, Sir?”

“As you know, Voldemort (here Remus cringed), is causing more damage than ever. The Ministry’s continued ineffectiveness has led me to form my own group of people who are willing to go out and defend the innocent. The group is, for the moment, quite select and consists of my most trusted friends and colleagues. I would like for you to join that group.” Dumbledore finished speaking and sat back to watch the effect of his speech on the impressionable young man.

“Why me, Sir?” Remus asked.

“Because I need someone to be my eyes and ears among the students in Hogwarts. It has to be someone whom I can trust, and someone who can move from place to place without raising suspicion, such as a prefect. Are you willing to take on this role?”

“But why do you need me to spy on the students?”

“Remus, my boy, you may not be aware of it, but it is from here that many of Voldemort’s death eaters are being recruited. I need you to tell me if you hear of anything, anything at all, that may help in the fight against Voldemort.” Dumbledore ended his oratory by coming around the desk and placing his hand on Remus’ shoulder. “Now then, do you wish to join the fight against Voldemort?”

Remus, feeling that he owed everything to Dumbledore and wanting to do his part, immediately agreed to join Dumbledore’s group. “What about the oath, Sir?”

“I stopped you earlier because instead of swearing an ordinary oath, each member of my group is given an item of jewelry to wear. Unlike Voldemort, I will not mark your skin, and I cannot force you to join. You will, however, need to swear an oath of allegiance to me, promising to obey me in all things.”

Dumbledore then picked up a piece of gold and spoke an incantation over it. A few seconds later, a gold earring identical to the one already in Remus' ear appeared in Dumbledore's hand.

“This earring will prevent you from being able to discuss any matter that I deem confidential. It will also prevent information from being forcibly extracted from you. Once you put this earring in, you will not be able to take it out unless I remove it for you. Are you willing to do this for the greater good?” Dumbledore held his breath, wondering if the young man would capitulate to his request.

Not wanting to disappoint the Headmaster, Remus agreed. Passing the earring to Remus, Dumbledore smiled and asked Remus to repeat what he told him after placing the earring in. Remus slipped his usual earring out and his new one in. As he slid it into his ear, a tingling sensation pervaded his skin for a few moments before disappearing. He then did as Dumbledore asked and swore his allegiance to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore smiled as the boy left his office. He'd been looking for a way to recruit Lupin for some time. Black's escapade last night had provided him with the perfect opening. He knew that after last night, Lupin would be so grateful to be allowed to stay at Hogwarts, that he would have done anything Albus had asked him to.

He hadn't been lying to the boy when he had said that he needed someone who could spy on the students for him. He just hadn't been totally honest. He had also needed someone who was on his side, who could if necessary, infiltrate Voldemort's ranks. It was common knowledge that Voldemort had started to recruit dark creatures and the werewolf would have no problem filling that category. Smiling to himself, Dumbledore returned to his duties.

December 21st 1991

Little time remained before any memories of Dumbledore's treachery would disappear under the onslaught of the wolf. Minutes later the full moon rose, and as its light entered through the gaps in the wooden slats of the Shrieking Shack, Remus began his transformation. On fully transforming, the wolf, fueled by Remus' own rage, anger and despair, unleashed its fury on the Shack. By the time Remus awoke the next day, he was badly injured and the Shack lay close to ruins. Unable to find the strength to apparate out, Remus lay naked and shivering on the floor, bleeding from his wounds until he passed into unconsciousness. It would be two days before he had recovered enough to be able to apparate home.

As Remus was transforming on the hard, unforgiving floor of the Shack, Jamie Potter was reveling in the silken comfort of his own bed. He was glad to be home as missed his family terribly when he was at school. He had agreed with Ron that they would try and find something in his Dad's library about Nicholas Flamel. Lying back in the soft furnishings lining his bed, Jamie thought back to when he had first discovered that the school was housing something precious, the trip to find it's hiding place and how Hagrid's slip-up had provided them with a clue in their search to discover the item's identity.

September 11th 1991

Jamie had been heading for the Defense classroom when he spotted Professor Dumbledore and Hagrid, the groundskeeper up ahead in the corridor. They had their backs to him but their voices were quite audible, sounding to Jamie as clearly as if he had been standing next to them.

"Hagrid, I just wanted to thank you again for picking up my parcel from Gringotts last July. I only recently found out that an attempted robbery was made on the very same vault I had it kept in, barely minutes after you returned here with it."

Jamie stopped in his tracks at the Headmaster's words. He had read about the Gringotts robbery in the Daily Prophet just last week. He stepped backwards quietly so that he was hidden in the shadows and continued to listen to the conversation.

"Twas nothing, Professor Dumbledore, Sir."

"Ah, but without you Hagrid, the contents of that parcel would have been stolen, instead of being safely hidden on the third floor. By the way, how's Fluffy doing?"

"He's doin' just great. Thanks for askin'."

"Well Hagrid, as much as I have enjoyed our little chat, I need to be getting along".

And with that, Dumbledore disappeared in the direction of his office. Jamie stepped out from the shadows and wondered what it was that had nearly been stolen from Gringotts; whatever it was, it was now hidden on the third floor. Deciding that he needed help, he set off to find Ron and Neville. When he arrived at the library though, Neville was nowhere to be found and Ron and Seamus were sitting together struggling through their homework.

"Hey guys." Jamie sat down and looked round to make sure no-one could overhear his conversation. "Do you remember reading about the Gringotts break-in last week?"

"Yes, why?" Ron asked.

"I just overheard Professor Dumbledore and Hagrid discussing the break-in. Apparently Hagrid managed to collect something for Professor Dumbledore from Gringotts just before the break-in." Jamie went on excitedly.

"So?" Ron wondered why his friend was so animated about a break-in.

"Let me finish speaking. From what they were saying, it would appear that the mystery item is hidden here, on the third floor."

"You mean the same third floor we're not supposed to enter." Seamus reminded Jamie.

"I don't care. I want to know what's hidden and I'm going to the third floor tonight to find out." Jamie sounded determined. "Are you in?"

Ron, who had always imagined himself as a brave adventurer not afraid of anything, didn't hesitate. "You can count me in."

Seamus, after thinking about it for a minute or two, sighed and agreed to go as well.

"What about Neville and Dean?" asked Ron.

"We can tell them later" Jamie answered.

Little did Jamie know that Dumbledore had purposely allowed him to overhear the conversation. On reaching his office, Dumbledore sat down at his desk and opened the top drawer. He picked up the parchment that lay there. He smiled to himself; the parchment had proved useful once again. The parchment wasn't simply just a piece of paper; it was also a map which showed the position of every person in Hogwarts once activated. He had been using it today when he had spotted Hagrid in a corridor close to his office. He had also spotted Jamie Potter heading in Hagrid's direction. Dumbledore had just had enough time to intercept Hagrid and engage him in conversation; casting a spell to make their voices carry, completely aware that Jamie Potter had been hiding in the shadows, listening to every word.

Smirking, Dumbledore tapped the parchment with his wand and said "Mischievous Managed". The information that littered the parchment faded from view and Dumbledore returned it to his drawer. He had taken possession of the parchment on the night of Severus Snape's werewolf incident. When he had questioned James Potter about what had happened, James had admitted to owning a map which told him where everyone was in Hogwarts at any given time. James had spotted Black leading Severus out to the Shrieking Shack. Of course Dumbledore had confiscated the map which had caused a slight rift to spring up between Black and Potter.

The map had proved useful many times since he had first confiscated it. He had tried to copy it but even he had been unable to mimic the

four boys' success. Even though three of the four Marauders had been willing to tell Dumbledore how to create a map of his own, Black had refused and all attempts to get the information from Black's mind had met with failure. Dumbledore didn't know but when Sirius had learnt from James about Dumbledore's trying to recreate the map, he had placed a copy of how to make it in a pensieve at his parents' home and then asked his brother to obliviate him. Dumbledore had intended to question the boys again, but events had overtaken him and before he knew it, James was dead, and Sirius was missing with everyone believing him to be not only the Potters' secret keeper, but also one of Voldemort's lieutenants.

Later That Night

Ron, Jamie and Seamus burst into their bedroom. Hearing them come in, Neville sat up. Dean wasn't there; he'd gotten in the way of a potions explosion and was therefore spending the night in the hospital wing.

"Where have you been? Neville demanded. He'd been unable to fall to sleep.

"How come you're not asleep yet?" asked Ron, ignoring Neville's question.

"You three were missing, and I was waiting up for you to return." Neville didn't want to tell them the truth; that he had gotten so nervous about the flying lesson happening the next day that he had ended up being unable to fall asleep.

The three boys realized that they had forgotten to fill Dean and Neville in on their plans for that evening. With Dean not there, they imparted to Neville what had happened.

"... and so when we opened the door to hide from Filch, we couldn't see anything, it was too dark. We shut the door and turned around just as Seamus lit his wand. I couldn't believe it. There was a huge dog sleeping in the room. That wasn't the scary bit though. The thing had three heads and Ron woke it up by screaming (here Ron protested that it had been a yell, not a scream) and we only just made

it back out of the room before the dog got us.” Jamie’s eyes were still bright from the excitement of the adventure.

“Did you find anything?” Neville asked.

“No, but Seamus spotted that the dog was sitting on a trapdoor. I bet whatever Dumbledore is hiding is being kept under the trapdoor.”

Unable to do anything further that night, the four boys got into their beds and settled down to sleep.

October 4th 1991

Ron, Seamus, Dean and Jamie headed off to see Hagrid, who had invited Jamie and his friends over to meet Fang. When they arrived, the door was open but Hagrid was nowhere to be seen. Jamie went in, and called out “Hagrid, are you in here?”

Looking around, Jamie spotted the same newspaper article on the break-in that he had read last month sitting on Hagrid’s table. At that moment Hagrid returned and apologized for being late. He invited the other three boys in. Just as Hagrid entered he noticed Jamie looking at the newspaper article.

“Jus’ throw tha’ on th’ fire for me would yeh?” Hagrid asked Jamie.

“Of course.” Jamie crumpled up the paper and threw it into the flames. “I’ve already read about it anyway. It was really exciting how the item in the vault had just been removed when Gringotts got robbed, wasn’t it?”

“I would'na know anythin’ ‘bout that.” Hagrid sounded nervous.

“But I thought you were there on the day of the robbery?” Jamie fished a little.

“How do yeh know tha’?” Hagrid asked.

Jamie improvised. "I saw you going into Gringotts when I was collecting my school supplies. I wonder what was nearly stolen and where it is now."

Hagrid became even more flustered and changed the subject. "An'way, how yeh boys doin' at school?"

"It's okay. I miss my family though. But it is exciting having such a big castle to explore, isn't it, Ron? Jamie asked.

Catching on to Jamie's lead, Ron carried on. "Yeah. I think we've been everywhere."

"Wha' do yeh mean, everywhere?" Hagrid asked.

"Well, we explored the dungeons, the astronomy tower and the fourth floor. But we had the most fun on the third floor where we met a three-headed dog." Jamie decided to stop prevaricating and see if Hagrid knew anything about the animal.

"Yeh three met Fluffy?" Hagrid enquired.

"If Fluffy is the three headed dog, then yes, we have." Seamus piped up. He was still having bad dreams about it.

"A beaut' ain't he?" Hagrid said going slightly misty eyed.

"A beaut?" yelped Ron. "It nearly bit our heads off. Who in their right minds puts a three headed dog in a school full of children?"

"Well, yer shouldn'a bin on that floor." Hagrid had lost his misty eyed look.

"But why is there a dog like that in the school, Hagrid?" asked Jamie. "Is it guarding something?"

"It's none of yer business. It's between Professor Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel." Hagrid clamped up then, realizing that he had said too much.

Not wanting to upset Hagrid, Jamie jumped up. "I'm sorry, Hagrid, but we need to be going. Dinner is in ten minutes and we shouldn't be late."

"Off yeh go then and yeh boys forge' all 'bout wandrin' roun' the school. It's no' safe." Hagrid chastised the boys as they filed out of his hut.

Grinning at each other, the boys sped off towards the Great Hall.

If only Jamie had known that Dumbledore had purposely provided Hagrid with information about the mystery object, knowing that Hagrid was incapable of keeping a secret, things might have turned out very differently in his future.

THE PRESENT

January 10th 1992

Dumbledore sat in his office and placed the note he had finished writing inside an envelope. He then affixed this to the parcel that lay wrapped on his desk. He called out for his house elf, Snod.

"I is here Master Albus." Snod inclined his head in deference to the Headmaster.

"Take this parcel and put it on the bed of Jamie Potter. You will tell no-one of this. Make sure you are not seen."

"Yes, Master Albus." Snod grabbed the parcel and vanished.

Later that day

Harry was now back into the swing of things at school. His shoulder felt much better since Madam Pomfrey had healed it. He had written to his Mum who said that his Dad was feeling much better; although none of the memories he'd lost had returned. Harry had passed on this information to Dumbledore when he enquired after Remus' health.

Today though it wasn't his Dad who pervaded Harry's thoughts, it was Hermione. Harry was worried about her. His friend had seemed quiet and out of sorts when she returned to school after the holiday. When he'd questioned her, she had avoided the subject and said that nothing was wrong. Harry had dropped the matter until today, when he had found Hermione sitting in the freezing snow behind a large tree crying. He had noticed her missing at dinner and had gone looking for her. A second year had told him that she had seen her outside. Because it was dark, it had taken Harry some time to find her.

"Hermione, what's wrong? Did somebody do something to you?" Harry was really worried.

Looking up through her tears, Hermione saw Harry's concerned face peering down at her. "I'm fine. It's nothing."

"I don't think it's nothing." Harry grabbed Hermione's hand and pulled her to her feet. "Let's get inside and we can find an empty classroom."

Hermione let herself be towed along by Harry. As soon as they entered Hogwarts, Harry used drying and warming spells on Hermione, who smiled gratefully. After checking no-one was around, he pulled her into the nearest empty classroom and locked the door. Hermione found herself being gently pushed into a seat.

"Did somebody hurt you Hermione?" Harry asked, still looking worried.

Hermione just shook her head.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

Hermione just shook her head again, and closed her eyes to try and trap the tears that were once more threatening to fall. She didn't reopen them until she felt Harry kneeling at the foot of her chair. He took her hand.

"Please Hermione, I want to help. Perhaps talking about it might make you feel better." Harry pleaded.

Having bottled everything up inside, Hermione decided that she needed to tell someone before she went mad. "If I tell you, you can't tell anyone else, not even Dudley."

Hermione sounded quite firm and it was obvious that if Harry didn't agree, he wouldn't find out what was troubling her. "I promise I won't tell another soul unless you say I can." Harry was emphatic in making his pledge.

Reassured by Harry's tone, Hermione proceeded to tell him what she had found out at Christmas. Harry was stunned but didn't let Hermione see his reaction.

"...and now, even though he says he loves me, and that I'm the Snape heir, I still think he loves everyone else more than me. What if he had to choose between his real children and me?" Hermione was crying again by now.

Harry thought for a moment before responding. "Hermione, if he didn't love you, he wouldn't have made you his heir. He must have loved you very much to do that."

"That's what he said. But how do I know it's true?" Hermione was wringing her hands in anguish.

"I thought you were familiar with pureblood customs." Harry said.

"I am" Hermione responded, wondering where Harry was heading with his remark.

"Then you should know that someone cannot make a person their heir unless they truly believe that that person should be the rightful heir. If you're not a blood relative, as you weren't, then the magic requires both love and intent to make the bestowal work. Unless he loved you and truly believed it, Professor Snape couldn't have made you his heir." Harry logically told Hermione.

"I've never read that. Where did you find this out?" Hermione was, as usual, anxious to find out everything. She hated it when she didn't know something about a subject.

"You know that my Dad's a wizard right?" Hermione nodded. "Well he's also a muggle teacher but before he married Mum he used to teach European Wizarding History in France; I can't remember the name of the school though. He taught me and Dudley all about wizarding history and customs so that we wouldn't fall behind when we started Hogwarts. Dad told us all about Professor Binns' classes." Harry explained, pulling a face when he mentioned Professor Binns.

"So Papa really must love me. But how would you feel if you found out you were adopted and your father wasn't your real one?" Hermione persisted.

Harry smiled; he was more than qualified to answer this question. "Mum and Dad aren't my birth parents. I don't know who my real parents were but Dad and Mum told me that they loved me very much. I know my Dad loves me as much as he does my sisters, who are his and Mum's children. Dudley is Mum's son but not Dad's. So we are a bit of a mixed family."

No longer feeling so alone, Hermione threw herself into Harry's arms knocking him onto the floor, and burst into tears yet again. Feeling a little uncomfortable, Harry decided to treat her as he would one of his sisters, putting his arms around her and rubbing her back. Her sobs slowly abated as she continued to hug him. Finally she lifted up her head, said "thank you" and then kissed Harry on the cheek.

Harry blushed, released Hermione and stumbled to his feet. "That's okay. If you want to talk to me again, you can. I was much younger when I found out that I was adopted so I didn't really ever worry about Dad and Mum not loving me as much as the other children."

Hermione had, by now, fully regained control of her emotions. "Thanks, Harry. I didn't know what to do until you came along. I need to go to the Library now though. There are a few things I need to look up." Hermione kissed Harry again on the cheek, unlocked the door and disappeared up the corridor.

Harry dawdled the entire way back to the Ravenclaw common room, thinking about what Hermione had told him. He then touched his

cheek, remembering Hermione's kisses. He was happy that he had been able to help her. She was, after all, his best friend. A smile stayed on his face for the rest of the evening.

Jamie Potter was tired and bored. Ron and Seamus were busy playing their third game of chess and Jamie hated chess. He had spent most of his free time that afternoon in the library looking for Nicholas Flamel. His search had proved fruitless yet again. He decided he would go to bed early and wished Ron and Seamus goodnight. Both boys just grunted and returned to their game.

On entering the dormitory, James spotted the parcel that was sitting on his bed at once. It certainly hadn't been there before dinner. Dropping onto his bed, Jamie opened the envelope that had been placed on top of the parcel and read the note it contained.

"This has been in my possession for some time now. It belonged to your father, James Potter, and was always intended for his first-born. Take good care of it and use it wisely.

A Friend"

Jamie put down the note and ripped open the parcel. He was shocked to discover what it contained. It was a cloak; an invisibility cloak. He had seen one before when his cousin had been given one by his Dad. He knew that they were very rare, and wondered who had been keeping this for him. After dropping the cloak into his chest, and barely unable to keep his excitement under control, Jamie ran down to the common room, having abandoned all thoughts of sleep.

"Ron, Seamus. Come quick. I have something I need to show you." Jamie interrupted the boys' fourth game by slamming into the chess board and knocking over the chessmen who starting raising their fists and cursing at Jamie for his clumsiness.

"Jamie, I was just about to win" Seamus whined. Ron had beaten him three times in a row and Seamus had been close to winning for the first time ever.

"Forget about the chess game. Pack up and come with me now." Jamie ordered.

Wondering what had gotten their friend into such a state, the boys did as he asked. Soon all three boys were crowded onto Jamie's bed and were looking at him expectantly. Jamie reached into his chest at the foot of the bed and pulled out the cloak.

"Bloody hell. Where did you get that from?" Ron blurted out.

"It's just an old cloak. What's all the fuss about?" asked Seamus, who had no idea of what Jamie was holding in his hand.

Not bothering to say anything to the two boys, Jamie lifted up the cloak and swung it over his head.

As he disappeared, Seamus exclaimed "Bugger me. You've got to give me a go."

Jamie reappeared and let both boys try out the cloak.

"So where did you get it from?" Ron asked again.

"I don't know. There's a note, there on my cupboard." Jamie pointed towards the note.

Ron and Seamus both read the note. They couldn't figure out how who had written it but to be honest neither of them cared. Their best friend had an invisibility cloak and both boys were now thinking about all the ways they could put it to good use. A noise from outside the dormitory interrupted the three boys. Jamie quickly shoved the cloak into his chest just before Neville and Dean walked into the dormitory. None of the boys spoke as they all got ready for bed and the lights were turned out.

16th January 1992

"Watch where you're treading." Jamie's whispered rebuke sounded loud in the dark corridor.

"Seamus keeps pushing me." Ron whined.

"I do not." Seamus protested.

The three boys were currently all crammed together under Jamie's invisibility cloak. They had spent part of the night in the Restricted Section of the Library looking for Nicolas Flamel and were now heading back to the Gryffindor common room. Up ahead, their path was blocked by Professor Snape and Professor Quirrell. The two seemed to be having a heated conversation.

"I see you failed again, Quirinus." Severus drawled smoothly.

"I d-don't know what you are t-talking ab-about, S-Severus." Quirrell responded.

"Don't ever let me catch you on the third floor again, Quirinus." Severus held his face mere inches away from Quirrell's own.

"I w-was I-lost. The staircases sh-shifted." Quirrell stepped back out of Severus' reach.

"As I said, don't ever let me find you there again. I wouldn't want to have to do something drastic. Goodnight, Quirinus." With that Severus swept off, coming close to running into the three boys, who were forced to move backwards into the room behind them to avoid a collision.

Quirrell headed off in the opposite direction muttering softly under his breath.

After making sure the corridor was clear, the boys went to step out of the room. It was at that moment that the moonlight caught an old mirror standing at the back of the room. Intrigued Jamie went back into the room and up to the mirror. He could just about read the words that were carved in a semi-circle around the top of the mirror, "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi".

"Come on Jamie, we've got to get back." Ron said, wondering why his friend was so transfixed by a mirror.

"No, Ron. Come here and look." Ron came further into the room but couldn't see what was so interesting.

Seamus pushed past Ron and stood in front of the mirror. As he looked into it, he could see his parents. Both were performing magic. He turned to look behind himself but there was no-one there. "What do you think this mirror does?"

"What did you see?" Jamie asked.

"Me Mam and Dad, but both of them were doing magic. But me Dad's a muggle." Seamus responded.

Now intrigued, Ron pushed the two boys out of the way. "Let me see."

Ron peered into the mirror and suddenly there he was. "Wow. I look older, and I'm dressed like a knight. I've killed a dragon. Do you think it shows the future?"

Jamie said "I don't know. I saw myself sitting in a large room on a throne. Everyone was bowing to me."

"Well, you are the Boy Who Lived." Ron responded.

Jamie wondered. He hadn't told Ron everything. Not only had he been seated on a throne in a large room but it had been opulently decorated. He had had bodyguards standing on either side of him. Two more guards had been standing in front of him and between them, held together by chains and looking bruised and battered, had been Hermione Snape and Harry Lupin. They then joined the other people in the room, bowing in submission to him. He had sat on the throne looking oddly triumphant. The vision disturbed him, and he decided to try and forget about it.

Seamus was looking closely at the writing on the mirror when he let out a yell. "The spelling's backwards."

Jamie moved back towards the mirror, and Jamie read the writing in reverse. "I show not your face but your hearts desire."

Suddenly Jamie yawned. "Look guys. We can work out exactly what the mirror does tomorrow. I'm tired." He had seen enough that night and just wanted to leave; he turned and headed towards the door.

The other two boys walked up to Jamie, who pulled the cloak over the three of them and they left the room. The boys decided that they would return tomorrow. However, when they did, the mirror had gone.

14th February 1992

Hermione woke early. She was glad that she only had charms and history that day as she planned to spend the afternoon with Harry and Neville working on their history projects. Her roommate, Daphne, was still asleep. Hermione made sure she didn't wake up her as she left her room. She was just glad that she didn't have to bunk in with Millicent Bulstrode, who apparently snored like a fiend. That unfortunate fate fell to a new student who had transferred at Christmas, a Tracey Davis, whom Hermione quite liked.

As she headed for the Great Hall, she was nearly knocked over by Ron Prewett. "Watch where you're walking, Snape."

"If you weren't in such a hurry, you might have actually noticed me coming along the corridor." Hermione responded angrily.

"Just get out of our way, Slytherin." Seamus said as he pushed by Hermione, knocking her into the wall.

Losing her balance, Hermione hit her head and collapsed onto the floor. At that moment Harry and Dudley came into view and spotted Hermione slumped on the floor, surrounded by the Gryffindor trio.

"Get away from her, Potter." Harry barked out.

"I wouldn't touch her if you paid me, Lupin." Jamie said, laughing nastily.

Harry had never felt so angry in his entire life and forgetting about his wand, he ran forward and punched Jamie in the face. Jamie staggered backwards, clutching his bleeding lip. Harry would have hit him again if Ron and Seamus hadn't grabbed him.

"What's going on?" Minerva McGonagall appeared from around the corner. She had heard raised voices and had gone to see what was going on. Turning to the boys she snapped "Potter, Lupin, stay where you are. Miss Snape, are you alright?"

Hermione shook her head, knowing that if she tried to answer she would start to cry. Minerva looked around and noticed Dudley standing a little further back up the corridor. "Mr. Lupin, can you tell me what happened?"

Dudley wasn't sure what to do, but when he looked at his brother, Harry gave an almost imperceptible nod of his head. "Me and Harry were walking down to breakfast when we saw Hermione sitting on the floor surrounded by Prewett, Potter and Finnigan. Harry told Potter to get away from her. Potter said something nasty back and Harry hit him.

Minerva turned to face Jamie. "Is this true, Mr. Potter?"

"He started it."

"Mr. Lupin. What did Mr. Potter say to provoke such an attack?"

Harry decided that if he was going down, then Potter was too. "I told him to get away from Hermione, and he said he wouldn't touch her if I paid him. I'm sorry Professor, but I couldn't let him get away with insulting Hermione like that."

Minerva just shook her head in disappointment at Jamie. "Mr. Potter, Twenty-five points from Gryffindor, and a week's detention to be served with me."

"But..." Jamie interceded.

“I suggest you keep quiet, Mr. Potter before I make it two weeks’ detention.”

Jamie wisely shut up.

Minerva then turned to Harry. “Mr. Lupin, it is all well and good that you came to the defense of another student, but fighting is not tolerated at this school. Twenty points from Ravenclaw. Now, Mr. Lupin would you please help Miss Snape up to the hospital wing. Once you have taken her there, please return here for breakfast.”

Huffing, Minerva stalked off up the corridor. She hated having to take points from her Gryffindors.

Harry gently helped Hermione up off the floor, noticing as he did so that her head was bleeding. “Hermione, you’re bleeding.”

Hermione put her hand to her head, looked at the blood and promptly slumped into Harry’s arms. Dudley rushed forward, and between them, they managed to hold Hermione up to carry her to the hospital wing.

Students scattered as Severus Snape swept up the corridor. He had just been told by Daphne Greengrass that she had seen Hermione being supported by the Lupin brothers heading towards the hospital wing.

“What the hell have you two done to my daughter?” said Severus, drawing his wand as he stormed into the hospital wing.

Luckily for the boys, Madam Pomfrey immediately stepped in front of them. “Severus, put your wand away this instant. Harry and Dudley did nothing. They were told to bring Hermione here by Professor McGonagall.”

Severus reined in his temper and put his wand away. Hermione groaned and Severus pushed past Madam Pomfrey and the boys to rush to her side.

“Hermione, honey, what happened?” Both boys had never heard Snape speak in such soft tones before.

Madam Pomfrey decided that it was best if the boys left, and started to usher them towards the door. Just then Hermione moaned Harry’s name.

Severus turned. “Where do you think you’re going, Lupin? I want to know what happened to my daughter.”

Hermione interceded before Harry could say anything. “Papa.”

Severus turned back to his daughter.

“It’s not Harry’s fault. He was defending me.”

Severus felt his temper start to rise again as he ground out “Lupin, you WILL tell me what happened.”

Hermione was by now unable to speak as she was being fed several potions by Madam Pomfrey.

Feeling more than a little intimidated, Harry started to explain what he had seen. “I was going down to breakfast with Dudley when I saw Hermione huddled on the floor surrounded by a group of boys. She was already hurt when I first saw her.”

“And why did Hermione say you defended her if she was already hurt?” Severus wanted to know every last detail.

“I told one of the boys to leave her alone. He said he wouldn’t have touched her if I paid him so I hit him.” Harry stood looking at the floor.

“I want these boys’ names NOW” Severus barked out.

“Mr. Lupin, you can leave and return to breakfast.” Minerva strolled into the hospital wing. She had noticed that Harry and Dudley hadn’t returned and had set off in search of them.

Harry and Dudley didn't need telling twice and almost ran from the room.

"Minerva, my daughter is lying in a hospital bed after being assaulted. I want to know who did it." Severus demanded.

"I have already punished the boy concerned. I know you are upset, but I cannot allow you to pursue this matter any further." Minerva knew that if Severus found out who had assaulted Hermione, all three boys would be danger of serious retribution from him.

"You don't really think that I'm just going to let this go, do you? I will get to the bottom of this and I will find out who did this to my daughter." Severus would have left the hospital wing if Hermione hadn't called out to him.

"Papa, please don't hurt anyone." She then started crying.

Severus rushed over to the bed and gathered Hermione up in his arms. "I want whoever did this to be expelled."

Hermione managed to stop crying. "Professor McGonagall has dealt with the ringleader. Please just leave it be. Please, Papa." Hermione knew that if her father followed up the matter, there would be trouble between the Gryffindors and Slytherins.

Not able to refuse his daughter, Severus agreed to not to pursue the matter any further and, after hugging his daughter, he left to tell his wife about what had happened.

Minerva turned to Hermione. She didn't really want to have to take any more points from Gryffindor, but she had feeling that there was more to the incident than she had first thought. "Miss Snape, what happened before Mr. Lupin arrived?"

Hermione recounted how she managed to end up sitting on the floor with a bleeding head. Minerva sighed. She knew that Gryffindor were going to be losing a few more points before the end of the day, as she left the hospital wing in search of Finnigan and Prewett.

Lying back on the bed, Hermione drifted off to sleep thinking about Harry and how he had come to her defense.

One month later

Hagrid decided that he'd had enough after spending most of the day digging up plants for Professor Sprout; he needed a pick-me-up. After stopping off at his hut to wash his hands, he headed off to the Hogs Head.

"Evening, Hagrid" the old bartender shouted as soon as Hagrid had walked in through the door. "What can I get you?"

"Evening, Aberforth. A tankard of yer best ale." Hagrid picked up the huge tankard with both hands and headed for a table close to the door. He liked to watch the patrons coming and going.

A cloaked and hooded man came to stand by his table. "Do you mind if I join you? I feel like a little company tonight."

"No' at all." Hagrid was always willing to talk.

Already having acquired a drink, the man sat down and the two engaged in a friendly conversation. After a short time, the man asked if Hagrid was interesting in livening up the night with a little game of chance. Eager to supplement his earnings from Hogwarts, Hagrid agreed.

"Well my friend, you seem to have me beaten." The stranger rasped in that strange voice of his. "All I've got left to gamble is this dragon's egg, but I'm not sure that I want to part with it to just anyone."

Hagrid's eyes nearly fell out of his head. He'd always wanted a dragon. "I'm good with animals."

"How do I know that you could take care of such a dangerous beast?" the stranger wanted to know.

"I look afte' the only 'erd of domesticated thestrals in the entire country." Hagrid could almost taste his victory.

The stranger shook his head. "They're tame compared to a dragon; I think I'll cut my losses and be on my way."

"I 'ave a three-headed dog." Hagrid blurted out.

"A Cerberus? They are difficult to look after. How do you take care of it?" The stranger seemed interested in Hagrid's answer.

"Well, yeh feed him three times a day, give him plenny of beer to drink, an' play music to sen' him to sleep." By now Hagrid was desperate for the egg.

"In that case, I'm willing to try and win my money back with this egg." The stranger rasped.

Ten minutes later Hagrid left the Hogs Head crooning gently to the egg in his pocket and headed back to Hogwarts. Engrossed in the egg, he didn't notice the stranger taking the same path towards the school.

Before entering the school the stranger took off his cloak to reveal brightly colored robes that glistened in the moonlight. He headed to his office satisfied that he had done enough to set Jamie Potter up for his next test, that of loyalty to his friends. Little did he know that he had provided the very person he wished to defeat with the means he needed to get past Hagrid's pet.

Back at the Hogs Head, the man who had been sitting at the back of the pub stood up, and laughed out loud to himself, before leaving and heading back towards the school. However, instead of entering the school, he veered off and disappeared into the Forbidden Forest.

Chapter 13: Dragons and Danger

5th April 1992

"I'm fed up with looking through books. We're never going to find out who this Flamel bloke is." Ron whined, slamming shut the book he had been looking through.

Jamie and Seamus had been trying to find out some information about Fluffy. They'd found out that he was a Cerberus, otherwise known as a hellhound, but little more than that.

Jamie suddenly sat up. "I know, let's go see Hagrid. I've got an idea."

On the way down to see Hagrid, Jamie filled the two boys in on his plan. On arriving at Hagrid's hut, the boys were astonished to see it closed up, the curtains drawn and smoke pouring out of the chimney. It wouldn't have looked out of place in the middle of winter, but on that day it was unusually sunny and warm. Jamie knocked on the door.

Hagrid's face appeared in the crack. "Sorry boys. Busy." He then shut the door.

The three boys looked at each other. Jamie knocked again.

Hagrid reappeared. "Wha' is it?"

Forcing a few tears into his eyes, Jamie looked pitifully at Hagrid. "I really need your help. I don't know who else to turn to."

"Elp with what?"

"My assignment. It's all about unusual animals and I don't know anyone who knows more about them than you do Hagrid." Jamie's bottom lip trembled as he looked beseechingly at the tall man blocking his view of the interior of the hut.

Hagrid, being softhearted, sighed and opened the door. "You'd better come in then."

The room was sweltering. All three boys immediately shed their robes and jumpers. In the fireplace an oval object was vibrating away in a large pot.

Ron immediately recognized the object. "That's a dragon egg."

"How do yeh know that?" Hagrid asked.

"My brother Charlie works with dragons; he's told me all about them." Ron moved closer to the fire to examine the egg in more detail.

"Why have you got a dragon's egg, Hagrid?" Seamus wanted to know.

"I won it." Hagrid went over to the fireplace and lovingly turned the egg, crooning softly to it. Then, remembering the boys, gave them all a mug of strong tea. The boys were all thankful that Hagrid didn't have any homemade rock cakes to offer them; last time Seamus had broken a tooth on one.

"Hagrid, I need your help with my creatures essay for Defense Against the Dark Arts. I've been able to discover plenty about horned frogs and plimpies but I was wondering if you could tell me something about runespoors." Jamie smiled encouragingly at Hagrid.

Hagrid obligingly lectured to Jamie about runespoors, their eating habits and where they lived.

"The other creature I've been assigned is the Cerberus. I know what it eats and drinks but not how to tame it." Jamie looked slyly at Ron and winked.

"Well, tha' one's easy. Jus' play it some music an' it'll go right to sleep." Hagrid beamed, glad to have been able to share his knowledge with the boys. The egg rattled ominously. "Sorry boys, but yeh'll 'ave to go. I've things to do."

Hagrid lumbered over to the fireplace and began to gently stroke the egg which soon settled down.

The boys picked up their discarded clothing and headed out, yelling "Bye Hagrid" as they closed the door.

As they traced their steps back up to the school, they discussed the dragon egg. "We can't let him keep a dragon. He'll burn his house down." Ron told the two boys. "We need to tell someone."

"No way." Jamie shook his head. "Hagrid might lose his job." It wasn't through any particular loyalty to Hagrid that Jamie didn't want to see him fired; it was because Jamie knew that if he needed any more information about what was hidden on the third floor, Hagrid was his best source.

"How about stealing the egg and throwing it into the lake." Seamus suggested.

"You can't do that. You'll kill the baby." Ron exclaimed.

"Well, we can't just leave the egg with Hagrid." Seamus argued.

Ron thought for a moment. "I know, let's steal the egg and hatch it ourselves."

"That's just stupid." Jamie remarked. "Where would we hatch it and what do we know about dragons?"

"Of course", Ron slapped himself on the forehead. "I'll write to my brother Charlie. He'll be able to tell us what to do after we steal the egg."

"Are you sure he won't tell anyone?" Jamie wanted to know.

"No, he'd never get me into trouble", Ron stated comfortably. "Let's go back to our room and write him a letter."

8th April 1992

It was just after 2am when Charlie Weasley opened Ron's letter. He had been sitting propped up in bed, drinking a beer; his girlfriend, Tula, was tucked under his arm sleeping. An owl had delivered the

letter earlier that day and this had been the first chance he'd had to read it.

"Dear Charlie

We need your help. Hagrid has a dragon's egg he's trying to hatch in his fireplace and we're afraid he'll burn down his hut. My friends and I are going to steal the egg and take it someplace safe but we don't know how to take care of it. Can you write back and tell us what to do? Please don't tell anyone about this. We don't want Hagrid to get fired.

Your brother

Ron.

P.S. My friends are Jamie Potter and Seamus Finnigan.

P.P.S. The egg is yellow and blue with bumps all over it."

At that point Charlie sat up, spilling his beer all over Tula.

"What the hell?" she yelped.

"I've got to go."

"But it's 2am!" Tula protested, as she grabbed her wand to dry herself off.

"Sorry, it won't wait." Charlie climbed out of bed, got dressed and absently kissed his girlfriend on his way out. His mind was now entirely focused on what Ron had told him.

9th April 1992

Albus Dumbledore was disturbed by an owl tapping on his window. He put down his cup of tea and headed to the window to let the owl in. He recognized the owl as an express owl which had been magically enhanced to fly quicker. These owls were usually only used in an emergency, as magically enhancing the birds shortened their lifespan.

Albus took the letter from the bird which remained where it was perched, meaning that the writer expected an answer. He hurriedly opened the missive.

“Dear Professor Dumbledore,

I've just received a letter from my brother Ron. I'm attaching a copy. (Here Dumbledore read the copy of Ron's letter.) I believe the egg to contain a Peruvian Vipertooth, which not only eats humans but is also highly poisonous. I can't get away from here until 11th April to collect it, so I wanted to warn you about it. Hagrid is in danger if it hatches; the babies are MORE poisonous than the adults. It could easily kill someone as big as Hagrid, let alone someone of Ron's size.

I'd prefer it if you didn't mention this to Ron; he'll think I've betrayed him but the danger from this egg outweighs his concerns about loyalty to his friends. I should be at Hogwarts at around 8pm to remove the egg to somewhere it can be hatched in controlled conditions.

Many thanks.

Charlie Weasley”

Dumbledore put the letter down and smiled happily. Jamie Potter had now proven that he would do anything to protect his friends. The Boy Who Lived would be like putty in his hands. Remembering the waiting owl, Dumbledore sketched off a quick note to Charlie and attached it to the bird, which then flew off.

11th April 1992

Charlie Weasley apparated onto a patch of grass just outside of Hogwarts' grounds. Professor Dumbledore was waiting for him.

“Charlie, my boy, thank you for coming. I wonder, could you spare me a moment before we head in to see Hagrid?” Dumbledore enquired.

“Of course, my portkey back to Romania isn't set to go off for another hour.” Charlie had always liked the affable headmaster.

“Let’s go to my office.” Dumbledore led Charlie off in the direction of Hogwarts.

Twenty minutes later the two returned and, after knocking on the door, were allowed entrance to Hagrid’s hut where Dumbledore proceeded to inform Hagrid about what was going to happen to his precious egg. “Hagrid, I’m sorry but I can’t allow you to keep a dragon’s egg on the premises. It is far too dangerous. The egg will be transported to a dragon colony in Romania to hatch.”

Dumbledore then reprimanded Hagrid, his eyes twinkling to soften the dressing-down. “I will overlook such foolhardiness this once, but please try keeping dangerous animals to a minimum in future.”

Hagrid sniffled as he watched Charlie take his precious egg and put it into a specially heated container, ready for transportation.

“I’ll see you down to the gates.” Dumbledore held open the door for Charlie.

At the gates, the two men shook hands and Charlie sat down to wait for the portkey to activate while Dumbledore headed back to the Castle.

2nd May 1992

All of the Outcasts, except for Hermione and Dudley, were down by the lake enjoying a picnic provided by the Weasley twins. Dudley had been having problems with his potions’ paper and Hermione, being the resident brain on the subject, had offered to stay and help him. They had just finished and were heading out of the library, when their way was blocked by the Gryffindor Trio.

“Well, well, look what we have here, a slimy Slytherin and her Ravenclaw lackey.” Jamie spat. He hated Slytherins. He was really proud of the fact that his parents hadn’t been members of Slytherin house.

“Leave Hermione alone and get lost, Potter.” Dudley said, standing in front of Hermione.

“Why? You gonna make me?” Jamie taunted.

“Does your brother know you’re after his girlfriend?” Ron asked.

“I’m not his girlfriend.” Hermione came out from behind Dudley.

“Why, has Lupin come to his senses and dumped you?” Ron sneered.

“Just leave us alone and get out of the way.” Hermione tried to push past the three boys.

“Don’t touch me, Slytherin.” Jamie hissed.

“I wouldn’t touch you if you paid me!” Hermione spat back, echoing Jamie’s retort to Harry earlier that year.

“That’s because you can’t afford me, Snape.”

“Maybe so, but I still wouldn’t want you if I could!”

Dudley decided that things were getting a little ugly and once again resumed his position in front of Hermione. “Potter, just move out of the way. We don’t want any trouble.”

“Hey, Lupin’s scared.” Seamus mocked Dudley.

“No, he’s not.” Hermione said, coming to Dudley’s defense.

“Prove it.” Jamie challenged.

“He doesn’t have to prove anything.” Hermione stepped out from behind Dudley once more to face Jamie.

Ron pushed Hermione back towards Dudley. “It’s nothing to do with you, snake face.”

Dudley caught Hermione. “Are you okay?” Hermione nodded.

"Like I said before Snape butted in, prove it." Jamie reissued his challenge.

"How?" Dudley asked.

"Duel, midnight tonight in the Astronomy Tower." Seamus piped up.

"Fine. Who's your second?" Dudley snapped out. He'd had enough of Potter and his arrogance.

"Ron. Who's yours?"

"I am." Hermione offered before Dudley could say anything.

Ron laughed. "You can't do any better than a Slytherin girl, Lupin?"

Dudley had been about to refuse Hermione's offer but decided that Potter and Prewett needed to be taught a lesson. If he went down, he knew that Hermione would wipe the floor with both of them. "She's a million times better than you'll ever be, Prewett."

"In your dreams." Ron sniggered.

"See you there then, losers" Jamie said, knocking Hermione into the wall as he pushed past her.

"Mr. Potter, what do you think you are doing?" Professor McGonagall's voice came from the corridor.

"Nothing. They were getting in our way." Jamie griped.

"Miss Snape, I want to know what's going on." Minerva turned to Hermione.

"But she's a snake; you can't trust anything she says." Ron complained.

"Mr. Prewett. Ten points from Gryffindor for your lack of decorum." Minerva continued to look at Hermione, waiting for her response.

"We were trying to leave the library to join our friends and they wouldn't let us past, Professor." Hermione decided that she had better not mention the duel.

"Is this true, Mr. Potter?" Professor McGonagall demanded.

"We were only messing around. We wouldn't have done anything Professor." Jamie lied.

Minerva had a sinking feeling that Jamie wasn't being entirely honest. Sometimes she worried that the Boy Who Lived had something of a nasty streak running through him, a little like his father. "Mr. Potter. This is the second time this year I have found you harassing Miss Snape. Twenty points from Gryffindor."

"But Professor..." Jamie started to interrupt only to crumble under the weight of the Professor's stern look.

"If I find out that any of you are bothering Miss Snape again, I will not be responsible for what happens. Do I make myself clear?"

The three boys nodded and left quickly. Minerva turned to the two remaining children. "I suggest that you two go about whatever it is you were doing." With that she left the library.

"Come on Hermione. Let's go join the others by the lake. We need to tell them about tonight." Dudley said.

"Papa will kill me if he finds out. What have I done?" Hermione was now worried about her father's reaction. She had only offered to second for Dudley in the heat of the moment.

"Look Hermione, you can back out if you want to. I'm sure Harry will be my second." Dudley didn't want to get Hermione into trouble.

"No. I've already said I'll do it. They'll only think I'm a coward if I don't go." Hermione reasoned.

"Are you sure? I don't want you to get into trouble." Dudley persisted.

“No. I’ve said I’ll do it and I will. Come on let’s join the others.” Hermione smiled at Dudley, then took his hand and pulled him out of the library.

Severus smirked to himself. He had been coming up the corridor when he had seen the Gryffindor Trio stop his daughter and Lupin. Transforming into his animagus form, he had flown up into the rafters and clung to them, while he listened. He had nearly given himself away when Prewett had pushed Hermione but had stopped once he had seen her nod to Lupin that she was okay. He wasn’t too happy about Hermione taking part in the duel but he also knew that she could easily defend herself with her wand; he’d made sure of that.

Minerva had then come along and broken things up. She’d also confirmed his suspicions as to who had attacked his daughter on Valentine’s Day. Minerva was right about one thing; she wouldn’t be the one responsible for what happened to the boys. Seeing that the children had left, Severus dropped down from the rafters, transformed and resumed his original journey.

Midnight

Dudley met Hermione at the entrance to the Astronomy Tower. They looked nervously at each.

Dudley swallowed and straightened up. “Let’s do this.”

Together they ran up the stairs that led to the room at the top of the Astronomy Tower where the two Gryffindors were waiting. While they had been waiting, Ron had amused himself by taking potshots at the tiny bat that had been fluttering around the room.

“So, you came. I expected you to chicken out.” Jamie sneered.

“You wish.” Dudley retorted.

The two boys faced off. Ron started to count down from three. Before he had finished counting, Jamie fired a stunning spell at Dudley, who

hadn't been expecting such a premature assault. Knocked out, Dudley hit the floor with a loud bang. Hermione winced at the noise.

"Ready then, Slytherin?" Jamie grinned unpleasantly at Hermione.

"Of course, but I think we can get rid of the countdown." Hermione immediately sprang into a perfect dueling stance. Her father had taught her well.

"Stupefy" Jamie's voice rang out.

Hermione easily dodged the spell. "Doesn't work twice, Potter. Consopio".

Jamie ducked, the spell flying over his head. Before he had time to straighten up, Hermione had hit him with a stunning spell and he collapsed silently to the floor.

Ron advanced on Hermione and put his face close to hers. "You're so dead, snake face".

Even though Hermione knew she easily outclassed Prewett, a chill ran down her spine; the look in his eyes had been almost manic. She watched as he stalked across the room and turned to face her. "Confringo" he yelled. Hermione threw herself to the floor, the spell impacting on the wall behind to make a small hole. Where had Prewett learnt that spell? She was just glad that he didn't yet have enough power to make the spell lethal.

As Hermione threw herself to the floor, a figure suddenly appeared in front of Ron, who gulped; he was in so much trouble.

Severus smirked at Ron. "Prewett. A fair fight is one thing. Using a potentially lethal spell is another. I suggest you pack your things; you're going to be out of this school by the morning."

He then turned and helped Hermione up off the floor. She smiled her thanks at her father, and then turned to enervate Dudley, who demanded to know what had happened.

“Potter cheated.” Hermione explained.

Dudley then saw Professor Snape. “Oh crap.”

“Oh crap indeed, Lupin. Get up and escort my daughter safely back to the dungeons.” Severus then enervated Potter who quickly got to his feet.

Just as Dudley was making his way down the stairs with Hermione in tow, Severus’ voice floated down to him. “Lupin, ten points to Ravenclaw for defending another student.” As much as it grieved Severus to give points to any house other than Slytherin, the boy had defended his daughter. He also had the added bonus of knowing how much it would piss off the Gryffindors who were now standing in front of him.

“Finnigan, you can come out from under the invisibility cloak now.” Seamus removed the cloak and stood with Jamie and Ron to face the irate potions teacher.

“Finnigan, ten points from Gryffindor for being out of bed. Potter, twenty points from Gryffindor for cheating. You will both serve detention with me next Friday. Now get back to your tower, while I deal with Prewett. Before you go, I’ll take the cloak.”

Seamus passed the cloak to the potions master and headed towards the door. Wanting his cloak, Jamie didn’t move. “Potter, might I suggest you leave before you join your friend here to see the headmaster.” Knowing he was beaten, Jamie fled.

“Prewett, march.” Severus ordered.

By now Ron was crying. He knew his mother would kill him when she found out. Even worse, she would probably cut off his allowance AND he’d lose the money that Dumbledore was paying him to be friends with Jamie.

On reaching the gargoyles which guarded the entrance to Dumbledore’s office, Severus drawled the password “Stringmints” to

gain admittance. Pushing Ron in front of him, they mounted the staircase and headed up to the headmaster's office.

On entering the office, Severus found the headmaster still dressed and looking over some papers. Even though he hated it, Severus adopted a deferential tone. "I'm sorry to bother you, Professor, but this boy threatened and then attacked my daughter with a lethal spell. I want him expelled."

"What happened, Severus?" Dumbledore enquired. He couldn't have Prewett being expelled.

Severus told him about the duel and Dumbledore turned to Ron. "Why did you threaten Miss Snape in such a manner, and where did you find out about that spell?"

Haltily Ron answered the question. "I'm sorry about the spell. I'd heard Charlie mention it before, but I honestly didn't know what it would do. I was angry with Sn... I mean Hermione when I said she was dead. I was just trying to frighten her. Then Professor Snape appeared out of nowhere." Scared, Ron started to cry again.

Dumbledore hated crying children. "Thank you, Mr. Prewett. If you would please return to your tower, I need to speak to Professor Snape."

Ron left, wondering what was going to happen to him.

"You can't let him go. He could have killed my daughter." Severus ground out.

"Severus, the boy obviously just got caught up in the moment. I won't expel him for that."

"You can't be serious." Severus complained.

"I am. You may assign him a detention with the other two boys but he will not be expelled. You may go now." Dumbledore ordered.

Unable to disobey the headmaster, Severus left. He was going to make those boys' lives hell, even if only for one night.

8th May 1992

"Come on, we'd best get down to the dungeons. Snape will kill us if we're late." Jamie urged Ron and Seamus to hurry.

"I'm coming. I'm coming" said Ron, dawdling and not in any real hurry to be subjected to Snape down in the dungeons. He knew that after threatening Hermione and escaping expulsion, any time spent with Snape wasn't going to be pleasant. He'd also lost thirty points for Gryffindor after a rather uncomfortable session with the headmaster.

Just as the boys reached the first floor they were passed by Professor Snape who was actually running in the direction of the hospital wing.

"What was all that about?" Seamus murmured.

"Dunno", said Ron. "Perhaps someone's trying to break into his blood bank."

The three boys laughed at Ron's lame vampire joke, and then stopped when they saw Professor Dumbledore heading their way.

The headmaster came up to the boys. "I believe you three were to serve a detention with Professor Snape this evening."

"Yes sir, but I've just seen him running up the corridor." Jamie politely informed him.

"Professor Snape has an emergency to take care of. Therefore I am going to reassign your detention to Hagrid. You will report to the entrance of the school tomorrow night at 11pm."

"Yes, sir", the three boys mumbled.

Professor Dumbledore left and headed off in the same direction as Professor Snape.

“What do you think that’s all about?” Jamie asked the two boys.

“I’ve no idea. I wonder what we’re going to be doing with Hagrid.” Seamus responded.

“Probably something fun.” said Ron dashing back towards the Gryffindor common room. “Come on, we’ve got time for a couple of games of chess before we go to bed.”

Jamie just groaned as Seamus sped after Ron.

The Next Night

The three boys stood at the exit to the castle waiting for Hagrid. They were surprised when Filch came up to them; his raggedy looking cat in tow.

“Follow me. You’re in for a treat tonight.” Filch said, guffawing to himself.

As they reached Hagrid’s hut, the boys were surprised to see Hagrid standing outside checking his crossbow.

“Evening, Hagrid. I was just telling the boys that you have a nice treat lined up for them tonight.”

“Evenin’ Filch.” Hagrid then turned his back on the loathsome caretaker and started to talk to the boys.

“Righ’ then, wer goin’ int’ the Forest tonight...” Hagrid began.

Seamus interrupted, his voice shaking a little, “But it’s dark and scary in there. There might be banshees.”

Hagrid shook his head. “Yeh dunna get banshees ‘ere, Seamus. Jus’ werewolves an’ vampires.”

“Way to go, Seamus” Ron muttered.

“We’re gonna be lookin’ for unicorns. Summats bin killin’ them.”

Jamie swallowed hard. “What do we have to do if we find one?”

“Jus’ shoot red sparks from yer wand an’ I’ll come to yeh”, Hagrid instructed. “Seamus, yer with me.”

Seamus nearly collapsed with relief.

“Ron, Jamie, yeh two can take Fang. Jus’ so yeh know, ‘e won’t be much ‘elp, e’s scared of ‘is own shadow.”

Fang just looked at the boys and whined quietly.

“Follo’ me then.” Hagrid led the way through the bushes and into the depths of the Forest. They had been walking for almost ten minutes when Hagrid stopped, and sent Jamie and Ron off in the opposite direction to him and Seamus.

Ron had been given a huge lamp, which he held in front of him to light the way. Jamie followed behind, trying to stay in the circle of light cast by the lamp. As Ron passed by a particularly large clump of bright green bushes, Jamie spotted something on the leaves that shimmered in the lamplight.

“Ron, stop.”

Ron ground to a halt and turned back to face Jamie. “What’s up?” His voice shook.

“Look!” Jamie pointed to the silver spots that liberally adorned the leaves of the bushes.

“Do you think it’s from a unicorn?” Ron asked.

“I dunno. Let’s keep closer together.” Jamie was feeling more than a little nervous now. He didn’t want to shoot off red sparks to alert Hagrid just in case they found nothing.

The boys huddled together as they walked slowly ahead. More spatters of silver blood marred the path ahead of them, which suddenly opened up into a small clearing. There, in the center of the clearing, lay the unicorn whose blood had provided a trail for the boys to follow. Kneeling over the unicorn was a cloaked and hooded figure. Its face was attached to the neck of the unicorn and it appeared to be drinking its blood.

Ron screamed, disturbing the figure from its grisly task. It stood up and took out a wand; seconds later a bright green light was speeding towards the two boys. Neither moved; they were both transfixed to the spot with fear. Suddenly a second cloaked and hooded figure burst from the bushes to the right of the boys, knocking them to the ground. As their rescuer fell towards the ground, he managed to fire off a blasting spell at the blood-soaked individual, who jumped aside to avoid it. By the time the boys' savior had risen to his feet, their attacker had mounted a broomstick and flown off into the sky. The figure turned to the boys.

"Are you two okay?" If Ron had been a girl and a little older, he would have described the man's voice as having a smoky, almost sexual quality to it.

Still lying where the stranger had pushed him, Ron just nodded his head, tears streaking through the dirt that lined his face. Jamie, who wasn't moving, said nothing. Ron sat up and looked at his friend. In reaching his hand out to touch his prone friend, Ron noticed a lump under Jamie's cloak. Upon lifting the cloak, Ron nearly vomited. Under the cloak stood a short, slick looking stump, and it was protruding from the middle of his friend's stomach.

The cloaked man swore softly. He had had some medical training but not enough to deal with this kind of emergency. He knelt down in the dirt to face Ron. "I need you to stay with your friend while I go and get help. I'm not qualified to handle this sort of thing unaided."

At the thought of being left alone with his badly injured friend, Ron quickly became hysterical. "You can't leave me here in the Forest on my own. What if he wakes up? What if a werewolf comes along? What if...?"

Ron's words were cut off as the stranger sighed, raised his hand and sharply brought it down across Ron's face. The effect was immediate; the boy stopped panicking and began to cry harder.

"I'm sorry but we don't have time for hysterics right now. You must stay with your friend. If he wakes up don't let him move, it could kill him. Do you understand?" The stranger was speaking gently but firmly to Ron; he didn't need a repeat of Ron's earlier panic.

"Yes, Sir." Ron swallowed.

"Good boy. I'll be back soon with help." The stranger disappeared silently into the woods.

Suddenly remembering his wand, Ron picked it up and shot red sparks into the sky, hoping that Hagrid would be nearby.

As soon as the stranger had put some distance between him and the boys, he transformed into a beautiful golden eagle and took wing towards Hogwarts. On arriving at Hogwarts he flew in through the window he had left open and transformed.

Madam Pomfrey was sitting in her office with her feet on a stool, reading the latest edition of Witch Weekly and drinking a cup of tea, when she was disturbed by the doors to the ward flying open.

Jumping up she put down her magazine and teacup, and left the comfort of her office. "Professor, whatever is the matter?"

"There's been an accident in the Forbidden Forest. One of the students has been seriously injured. I don't have enough experience to deal with his injuries. I need you to come with me."

"But I can't leave. I have patients who are too sick to be left on their own."

"Shit."

“I’ll put a call through to St. Mungo’s. They can have a team of mediwizards here within a few minutes. Where shall I tell them to go?”

“Tell them to floo into Hogsmeade; they can apparate from there. I’ll fire off a locator beacon for them. And for Merlin’s sake, tell them to hurry.” The Professor rushed back out of the hospital wing, heading for his room so that he could resume his animagus form.

Ron heard footsteps heading his way and slumped in relief when he saw the stranger returning.

“Has he regained consciousness at all?” the man wanted to know.

“No. He’s moaned a little but that’s all.” Ron had kept a close eye on Jamie, hoping that he wouldn’t wake up. He didn’t know what his friend would have done if he had woken up and seen the stump sticking up out of his abdomen.

The stranger checked Jamie’s vital signs; they weren’t good. He then stood up and, after taking out his wand, shot a bright silver orb into the night sky.

“What’s that for, Sir?” Ron wanted to know.

“It will tell the team of mediwizards that are on their way where to find us.”

Hearing a noise, the man turned, wand drawn, ready to defend the boys again if necessary.

“Ron. Wha’ ‘appened?” Hagrid burst into the clearing at a run with Seamus behind him trying desperately to keep up.

Filled with relief to see a friendly face, Ron just burst into tears.

The stranger turned to face Hagrid. “They were attacked by whatever is feeding off the unicorns but I managed to drive it away. I have spoken with one your Professors. He is arranging for a team of

mediwizards to get here. I need to go now. Whatever you do, don't move the boy and don't move into the clearing. Stupefy."

After knocking them out, the stranger obliterated the trio of any knowledge of his appearance, making sure that Hagrid only remembered his final instructions. Just before disappearing into the woods, he whispered the words "Enervate."

No more than a few seconds had gone by when the sounds of popping filled the clearing and five mediwizards appeared, each carrying a small dragon leather bag.

One of the mediwizards immediately appraised the situation, and turned to Hagrid. "Get these two boys back to school. They'll only be in the way here."

Hagrid, feeling a little disorientated, realized that he had better do it quickly. He strolled over to where Ron was dazedly sitting on the ground and picked the boy up. "Seamus, follo' me." The three vanished into the night, heading back to the school.

The mediwizards then advanced on the boy lying on the ground, only for one of them to push his way to the front of the group. "Get out of the bloody way, that's my son."

The others stepped back, letting the man take the lead in dealing with the situation.

Another pop sounded in the clearing; it was Professor Dumbledore. One of the mediwizards broke away from the group to speak to him.

"How's the boy doing?" Dumbledore demanded. His plan to test the boy's courage had turned out to be a disaster.

"He's getting the best possible care. His father is with him."

Dumbledore relaxed. He knew Jamie's father would do everything he could to save the boy. He couldn't have his carefully orchestrated plans going wrong now. If the wizarding world lost the Boy Who Lived, it would be a catastrophe.

“Is there anything I can do?” Dumbledore wanted to know.

The mediwizard shook his head. “Like I said, he has the best team possible here. Healer Delaney has more experience in these types of injuries than anyone else I know. We can’t really do anything else but wait.”

Several long minutes passed until Jamie’s father stood up and signaled that they were ready to move him. The healer turned to Dumbledore. “I’m sorry, I’ve got to go.”

Dumbledore was left standing in the clearing as the medical team and Jamie Potter disappeared. A final pop and the clearing was left empty, except for the body of the unicorn, its broken body highlighted by the moonlight. The stranger, who had been hidden by a clump of bushes, transformed and flew back to the school.

11th May 1992

Ron lay in the hospital bed feeling a little lonely. Ron’s injuries had been healed quite quickly; he’d had a large bump on his head where he’d hit the floor, and a gash on his leg. He didn’t remember much about what happened; just a flash of green light and then Hagrid picking him up. Because of Ron’s apparent memory loss, Madam Pomfrey had decided to keep him in the hospital for a few days for monitoring. Seamus had been up to see him during lunch but had just left as he had classes that afternoon. Seamus had left Ron some sweets to cheer him up.

Ron opened up a chocolate frog, making sure to put his hand firmly on the frog to stop it jumping out of his reach. After popping it into his mouth, Ron picked up the card and groaned. It was another Dumbledore and he threw it onto the cupboard next to his bed.

Several minutes later, Madam Pomfrey came dashing into the ward, startled by Ron’s yell. “Mr. Prewett, what is wrong?”

Ron looked sheepishly at the matron. “Sorry, I just caught my finger on the cupboard.”

“Well, next time try and keep the yelling to a minimum. There are sick people here trying to rest.” She bustled back to her office.

Ron grinned to himself. He’d done it. He’d found Nicolas Flamel at last. He had been about to lie down and get some sleep when he suddenly realized what was written on the trading card and had yelled out, disturbing Madam Pomfrey.

Reveling in his newfound knowledge, Ron settled down to get some sleep. He was looking forward to seeing Jamie, who would be transferred from St. Mungo’s later that day.

What should be the final chapter of year one, will be posted within the next few days.

Chapter 14 - Choices

20th May 1992

Jamie Potter was bored of lying in the hospital wing with nothing but homework to keep him occupied. Ron and Seamus spent as much time as they could with him but it still didn't make up for having to stay there on his own. He had been excited at first when Ron had told him about finding Nicolas Flamel on the Dumbledore card. However the excitement soon wore off when he realized he couldn't do anything about it. So when Madam Pomfrey agreed to release him more than one week after he was first transferred, the first thing he did was head off to the library with Ron and Seamus. Now the boys knew where to look, it hadn't take them long to find their missing alchemist; it took them a little longer though to connect the information they found on him to what was hidden on the third floor.

12th June 1992

Jamie had just sat down to eat dinner when Professor McGonagall stood up and lightly banged on the table to get everyone's attention. "Professor Dumbledore would like to say a few words."

"Thank you, Professor. I'm going to be out of the school over the weekend on Ministry business. Professor McGonagall will be taking over my position while I am gone. If you have any problems please speak to her." Dumbledore sat down and started to tuck into his dinner.

Ron looked at Jamie and Seamus in horror. Seamus looked nervous and Jamie excited after hearing Dumbledore's speech.

"Ron, this is it, the chance Quirrell's been waiting for. Tomorrow night we are going to hide on the third floor and watch for Quirrell." Jamie whispered excitedly.

"Are you sure this is a good idea?" Seamus asked. "Perhaps we should tell Professor McGonagall what we think is going on."

“No way”, scoffed Ron. “She’d probably dock points and then give us a detention for spying on a teacher.”

“Ron’s right. It’s up to us.” Jamie stated.

Seamus smiled weakly and fell silent.

Early Sunday morning

Neville had woken up at 3am and had been unable to fall back to sleep. Two hours later he’d given up trying and had headed downstairs to sit in the common room in front of the fire. Even though it was summer, the common room tended to be a little chilly and there was usually a fire burning. He had just curled up in his preferred spot, a high backed wing chair, when he heard the portrait opening and the Golden Trio walked in.

“Well that was a waste of time.” Ron yawned loudly.

“Perhaps Quirrell will show up tomorrow. We can’t just give in.” Jamie insisted.

“I dunno. I’m not sure I want to spend another night on the third floor.” Seamus moaned. “I’m tired and we have classes on Monday.

“It’s the last week of school. We’ve already done our exams. Look, we can’t let Quirrell get the stone for You-Know-Who.” Jamie was adamant. “Let’s get some sleep. We’re going back tonight.”

Seamus grumbled a little as the three boys headed for bed.

Now wide awake, Neville sat up in the chair. He decided to wait for the three boys to fall asleep before going back upstairs to get dressed and heading off to find Harry.

In the Library

“...and so what do you think they are up to?” Neville finished. He had cornered Harry, Dudley and Dean in a corner of the library and told them about the early morning discussion he had overheard.

“Do you think we should follow them?” Dudley asked.

Harry thought about it. “I think we should. I’d be interested to know what they are doing; if necessary we can go for a teacher.”

Neville butted in then. “We can’t tell Hermione. It might be dangerous.”

“What might be dangerous and why can’t you tell me?” Hermione suddenly appeared in front of the boys. Engrossed in their conversation, the boys had failed to notice her making her way towards them.

“Hermione, before we tell you, you’ve got to promise not to tell your father.” Harry insisted.

“But, Harry...” Hermione started to say.

“Hermione, if you want to know what is going on, then you’ll make the promise.” Harry was resolute.

“Okay, I swear not to tell my father. Now tell me.” Hermione demanded; she hated not knowing something.

Neville wasn’t happy about Hermione knowing. He knew she would insist on accompanying them. He sat quietly as Harry filled Hermione in on what was going on.

Hermione listened for a few moments, and then gave a small yelp. She jumped up from the table and disappeared into the stacks. The boys looked at each other. What was she doing?

She reappeared a short time later carrying a rather large book, which she slammed onto the table. Opening it, she flicked through it until she found what she was looking for.

“Harry, do you remember when the Gryffindors were looking for Nicolas Flamel?” she asked.

“Yes, why?”

“Look.” Hermione pointed to the page she had turned to in the book.

Dudley read out the passage to which she was pointing. “‘Nicolas Flamel is the only known maker of the Philosopher’s Stone.’ Why’s that so important?”

“Because I think that’s what’s hidden on the third floor.” Hermione explained.

“Why are the Gryffindor gits so sure that Quirrell is after the stone for Voldemort though?” Harry wanted to know.

“They obviously know, or think they know, something we don’t. Let’s follow them tonight.” Hermione was now the most enthusiastic of the group.

The Outcasts agreed that they would meet just before midnight on the second floor by Moaning Myrtle’s Bathroom.

Midnight

“Harry, are you here?” Hermione whispered, only for a hand to cover her mouth and pull her into the shadows. Hermione struggled for a moment until she realized it was Harry.

“Shh. Filch was here not more than five minutes ago.” Harry whispered. “Come on, now we’re all here, we can go.”

Harry led the way up to the third floor, and the five children secreted themselves behind the statues of the ancient knights that guarded the entrance to the third floor corridor. They hadn’t been a moment too soon.

“Ron, you’re stepping on my foot.” Seamus complained loudly.

“Be quiet.” Jamie hissed.

Harry could hear the Gryffindors but he couldn't see them. Obviously Potter and his cronies were either disillusioned or hiding under something. The Gryffindors moved to stand behind one of the large columns which lined the corridor leading to Fluffy's door.

Hermione had been standing next to Harry when he suddenly gasped, grabbed his shoulder and collapsed in pain. "Harry, what's wrong?"

She knelt down next to her fallen friend just as Quirrell passed the hidden children on his way to Fluffy's lair.

After a few seconds, Harry started to feel better and smiled at Hermione in the darkness. "I don't know what happened. One moment I was fine and the next it felt as if someone had stuck something hot and sharp into my shoulder."

Up ahead, the door to Fluffy's den opened, and the sounds of a harp being played reached the ears of the two hidden groups. The Gryffindors removed the cloak that had been hiding them and headed into the room after Quirrell.

Harry turned to the four Outcasts. "Come on, we've got to follow them."

The five children ran to the room only to find a large three-headed dog sleeping in the room; its snores were accompanied by a harp which was magically playing. Over the course of the next minute, several things happened at once. Sounds of screaming reached their ears from the darkened depths beneath the trapdoor, the harp stopped playing and Dudley noticed that the large dog was waking up.

Dudley called out a warning. "Harry, the dog!"

Harry looked at the dog to see its eyes were now open. "Hermione, distract the dog. I'm going to follow the Gryffindors."

Hermione grabbed Harry by the arm. "Don't be so stupid. You don't know what's down there."

Dudley, after listening to Harry's instructions to distract the dog, fired off a stinging hex striking it straight on the nose. In that moment Dean and Neville both ran for the trapdoor, leaving the other three children to face a now very irate dog.

"Get out" Harry yelled.

The three children ran from the room and slammed the door shut behind them.

Taking control of the situation, Harry barked out instructions to Dudley and Hermione. "Dudley, go fetch Flitwick. Hermione, get your father. I'm going to find Professor McGonagall."

The two children looked at Harry for a moment before running off.

Neville and Dean landed on what felt like soft cushioning. Muffled screams could be heard coming from deep within it. It was only when tendrils suddenly snaked out to wrap themselves around the two boys that Neville realized what it was, Devil's Snare.

He yelled at Dean "Relax and don't fight it."

Knowing that Neville was the best in their group at herbology, Dean listened and within a few seconds the plant relaxed its grip on him, leaving him to fall through it and drop onto the hard floor below. Moments later Neville joined him. Up above them screams could still be heard.

Dean laughed a little maliciously. "Obviously they didn't relax!"

Neville grinned and pointed his wand at the plant and murmured "Incendio". He knew that the plant hated bright light and heat. A short time later three slightly charred Gryffindors dropped through to the floor below.

"What do you think you're doing here?" Jamie demanded.

"Rescuing you." Dean looked at Neville and grinned.

“We would have gotten out just fine without you.” Ron boasted.

“Yeah right.” Dean said sarcastically.

“Well you can go now. We’ve got things to do.” Jamie told the two boys.

“We’re not going anywhere. Do you see any stairs?” Neville asked.

Jamie looked around and realized that Neville was right. “Fine, but don’t expect us to help you when you get into trouble.”

He stalked off, leaving the remaining boys to follow behind him. A large ornate wooden door barred his way; Jamie tried the handle which opened easily. On stepping through the door, he walked into a room which looked as if it was filled with hundreds of tiny flying birds. At the far end of the room a door stood between the boys and whatever lay on the other side.

Ron’s voice came from behind him. “What do you think these are for?”

Jamie just shrugged as Dean cried out. “They’re winged keys.”

Upon closer inspection, the others were able to make out what Dean had spotted. The ‘birds’ were actually different shaped keys, all with gossamer light wings. After walking across the room and trying the door, only to find it locked and resistant to an unlocking spell, Jamie looked around the room. In the far corner, a broom was leaning against the wall. Waling over to it, Jamie picked it up and walked back to where the other boys were still standing watching the keys.

“I think I’m going to have to go after the key. Try and work out which key I am after.” Jamie was easily the best flyer of the group so no-one bothered to argue with his domineering statement.

Dean’s eagle eyes came to the rescue once more, and he pointed up to a key that was flying slightly slower than the others. “Look, that key up there; it’s got a broken wing.”

Jamie jumped onto the broom. It was then that the boys understood the purpose of the other keys. As Jamie took off into the air, the other keys became like a swarm of bees, attacking him again and again, in a desperate effort to stop him from reaching his goal. They were, however, unsuccessful as the boy grabbed his target from the air and flew down towards the locked door. Not stopping to dismount fully, Jamie threw the key to Seamus, who grabbed it, inserted into the lock of the door and threw the door open. All the boys rushed into the next room and slammed the door shut behind them. On the other side of the door, several keys hurtled into the door, unable to stop in time.

Lights flared into life as the boys entered the room.

“What is this?” Neville asked.

“I don’t know.” Jamie looked around.

“I do. It’s a chess set.” Seamus had played enough games of chess with Ron to be sure of his supposition.

“What do you think happens now?” Ron turned to the boys.

“Let’s find out.” Jamie scurried onto the checkerboard floor, only to find his way barred by some vicious looking pawns with drawn swords. He quickly backed off.

“I think we’re going to have to play our way across”, Ron surmised. “I’m the best at chess here, so I’d better do it.”

Ron ordered the four boys to take up positions on the board. He took the knight; he could sit atop of it and be able to command the board from his elevated position. All five boys were horrified to find that the chessboard pieces were not only sentient but violent as well. As each piece was taken it was smashed into pieces by its usurper.

It was during the final few moments of the game that, after looking at the pieces that remained on the board, Ron realized he had a tough choice to make; to give up or to go on. If they wanted to go on, then the only way to win was for him to sacrifice himself.

Seamus had also identified Ron's dilemma. "No. Ron don't do it. You could die."

"Don't do what?" Jamie asked.

"He's going to sacrifice himself." Seamus explained.

"It's the only way to win the game." Ron protested, and he then made the move before the boys could say anything more.

The other four watched in fascinated silence as the knight Ron was sitting on moved into position. The opposing queen slid forward, raised her scepter and smashed it into the side of the knight, causing a huge eruption of dust into which Ron fell. Once the air cleared, the boys could make out Ron lying amongst the rubble.

"Nobody move." Seamus yelled. He then moved into position and faced the king. "Checkmate."

The king released his sword, which crashed to the floor in a gesture of defeat. The four boys rushed to Ron's side.

"One of you needs to stay with him. I'm going to go on." Jamie declared.

"I'll do it." Neville spoke up. He decided that he'd rather spend time with somebody he disliked immensely than with someone who seemed to care more about achieving his objectives than he did his friends.

Dean turned to Neville. "Take care. I'll be back as soon as I can."

The two boys shook hands and Dean hurried after the two boys who had already left the room. Neville sat down by Ron to wait.

The next room contained a large, dead troll. All three boys were thankful that they wouldn't have to face it. The room after the troll was nothing more than a small antechamber. In its middle stood a table, on top of which seven bottles of various shapes and sizes were arranged in a line. As the boys crossed the threshold, black flames

leapt up behind them. Seamus headed to the door at the far side of the room, only to be repelled by the same flames that now blocked their retreat. Dean and Jamie had moved over to the table where the bottles stood.

A piece of paper lay on the table. Jamie read it and swore. "Bloody hell, we'll never be able to figure this out."

He threw the paper on the floor and stomped across the room to where Seamus was trying to extinguish the flames. Dean picked up the paper and read its contents out aloud.

"Now which choice are you going to pick?

Some of us kill, some make you sick.

Will you choose the short or the tall?

Which of us will make you fall?

Pick the nettle wine you may.

But if you do you're here to stay.

Pick the poison, your life is gone

But how to choose the correct one?

Is to the right danger or to the left demise?

Which bottle to pick, what's the right size?

Tall will save you, as will small.

To the left of wine death does call.

To move forward avoid each end.

But to go back one is a friend.

We're all the same, one, four and five.

But will we leave you alive?

Now make your choice, O Stranger

Death, drunkenness or danger?

"It's a logic puzzle!" Dean exclaimed.

"What's that?" Jamie asked.

"You have to figure the answer out from the clues. Now let me think." Dean looked at the seven bottles.

"One and seven stop us going forward, so we can rule them out. One of them will take us back through the flames." Dean slowly figured out what was contained in each bottle.

"I'm not going back." Jamie said stubbornly.

"Will you shut up, Potter? I'm trying to think." Dean returned to his task. "I think one, four and five are poison; therefore two and six are nettle wine; seven takes you back and three forward." Jamie picked up the third bottle; there was just enough liquid in it for one sip. Drawing his wand, Jamie stunned Dean.

"What did you do that for?" Seamus cried.

"Look at the bottle. There's only enough for one person. I couldn't take the chance he would try and take it from me. I need to go on." Jamie just knew it was his destiny to continue. "I trust you not to try and get it from me. Anyway, you can easily get back. Just drink out of the seventh bottle. I'm going on."

With that Jamie upended the bottle and tipped the liquid into his mouth. A feeling like ice trickling down his spine chilling him to his very toes. He took a deep breath and, before Seamus could say anything, ran through the flames and into the next room.

Seamus turned to Dean who lay on the floor. "Enervate."

Dean came to. "Where's Potter?"

Seamus laughed cynically. "He swallowed the only mouthful of the liquid that lets you move forward and now he's gone on alone. I can't believe I've been such a fool."

Seamus sat heavily on the floor and put his hands into head.

"What do you mean?" Dean asked.

"I've been an idiot. I've been friends with someone who didn't think twice about leaving his injured friend; someone who thought nothing of my leaving you here alone; someone who is not the person I thought he was. I've treated people so badly this year. My parents will be so disappointed in me." Seamus' voice broke as he tried hard to control his tears as he thought about how he had strutted around the school as one of Potter's lackeys, not really worrying about anyone else's feelings.

Seamus took a deep breath and stood up. "Dean, I'm so sorry. I've treated you really badly this year. I'm going to apologize to the Lupins and to Hermione Snape as well. Can you ever forgive me?"

Dean stood up and held out his hand. "Hi, I'm Dean and I'm pleased to meet the real Seamus Finnigan."

Seamus couldn't help but shed a few tears as he shook Dean's hand. "Come on, let's get out of here."

There was plenty of liquid in the seventh bottle so both boys took a swig from it and underwent the same feeling as Jamie had. Looking at each, they grasped each other by the hand and exited the room through the flames.

Third Floor

The three professors stood outside the door to Fluffy's den. "Are we ready?" Severus asked.

The other two just nodded and Severus pushed open the door. Fluffy was waiting for them. Flitwick's spell sailed under Severus' arm and hit the harp. Within a few moments, the large dog had settled down to sleep.

Severus turned back to the three children who had been told to keep a safe distance. "We will deal with you three on our return. Do not move from this spot. Do you understand?"

All three children nodded. Luckily when they had gone to fetch help all three teachers had still been up. They watched as the professors disappeared into the depths beneath the trapdoor. A bright light and puff of smoke suddenly shot up from the hole.

"I wonder what was down there." Harry said to the other two.

Neither Hermione nor Dudley responded; they were too nervous about what was going on to speak.

Minerva twisted her ankle as she landed on the floor of the dungeon after being dropped by the Devil's Snare. The two men immediately rushed to her assistance. She immediately brushed off their concerns and picked up a piece of fallen Devil's Snare. She then transformed it into a walking stick and hobbled into the key room.

The key was still nestled in the lock; the boys hadn't bothered to remove it in their hurry to get through the door. On entering the chess room, the teachers found Neville, Seamus, Dean and Ron huddled together in the middle of the chess set. Ron was still unconscious and bleeding from his forehead.

"Professor, Jamie still hasn't come back." Seamus told the Professor.

Sighing, Minerva undid her transfiguration and the chess pieces shrank down into their original unarmed configuration.

Severus turned to Filius. "I'll help Minerva get these boys out so that they can all go to the hospital wing. I'll be back as quickly as I can." He then took a small bottle out of his pocket. "This will get you through the flames and into the final chamber. If you manage to get out before I get there, it is the last bottle on the right to get you back through the flames again."

Minerva turned to face Filius. "Be careful."

Flitwick headed through the room with the dead troll in it and towards the room containing Severus' own contribution; the potions test with the cryptic clues. Flames sprang up behind him as he entered the room; he took a mouthful of the potions and kept walking through the flames which had now sprung up in front of him, and walked into the final room.

The Final Room

"So Potter, you finally decided to join me." Quirrell turned around from the mirror he had been staring into as Jamie entered the room. Jamie recognized the mirror as the one he had found in the abandoned classroom.

Jamie was surprised. "You were expecting me?"

"Of course. I knew you were hiding on the third floor. I assumed you would all follow me but I only needed one of you so I made sure only to leave enough elixir for one person to get through the flames. After last night I discovered I needed a willing assistant." Quirrell told Jamie.

Quirrell had been here last night? Jamie protested. "But we waited for you last night."

"I know; I heard you. You didn't hear me though did you?" Quirrell asked.

"But why come back?" Jamie realized that Quirrell must have been disillusioned and used some sort of silencing spell to slip past the three boys on the previous night.

"As I've already told you, I needed a volunteer." Quirrell explained.

"Now come here." Quirrell waved his hand, and bright blue flames leapt up, forcing Jamie to move away from them.

"I said come here." Quirrell demanded.

Knowing he didn't have much choice, Jamie stepped forward.

"Look into the mirror and tell me what you see." Jamie stared into the mirror. He saw the same room as he had seen before. Only this time, instead of being chained and kneeling before him, Harry Lupin was standing before Jamie holding out a red stone.

"Tell me what you see." Quirrell repeated.

"I'm in a large room. People are bowing to me. There are two prisoners chained and beaten; they're standing in front of me."

"Let me speak to the boy" a voice came from the back of Quirrell's head.

"But Master..." Quirrell started to speak.

"Do it now" the voice ordered.

Unwrapping the turban he always wore around his head, Quirrell turned so that his back was facing Jamie, who recoiled in horror at the face that was embedded in the back of Quirrell's head.

"Yes, Potter, not a very pleasant sight is it? This is what you reduced me to when the spell I cast on you rebounded." Voldemort's voice sounded harsh. "I need to rely on others to survive."

"At least you're alive." Jamie thought of his father who had been killed by this monster.

"I would hardly call this living, boy. Enough talk. You will get me the stone." Voldemort sounded angry.

“Why should I do anything for you? You killed my father.” Jamie blurted out.

Quirrell's head shook from side to side, as Voldemort denied Jamie's accusation. “I didn't kill your father. I was going to but my most loyal servant wanted that honor and I was happy to grant it to him. You should be grateful I let your mudblood mother live.”

Despite the danger he was in, Jamie was intrigued. “Why did you let her live and my father die?”

“Get me the stone and I'll tell you.” Voldemort's voice now became almost hypnotic.

Jamie desperately wanted to know why his mother had been spared but knew he could not let Voldemort have the stone. “No.”

“I'll even tell you why I killed your brother.”

Jamie was stunned. It was true then, he had had a brother. His Mum had always avoided the subject of that Halloween night and his Dad had forbidden him to ask her again. Now he knew why. Not only had he lost his birth father that night, but also his brother. His heart hardened against the fiend in front of him. “No.”

“I can give you what you saw in the mirror. Fame, glory, power; it can all be yours if you just get me the stone.” Voldemort tried to tempt Jamie.

Jamie thought about it for a second, and then realized that Voldemort would probably just kill him after he got the stone. “Go to hell.”

“So be it. Say hello to your father and brother for me.”

Flitwick entered the room in time to hear Voldemort's final words to Jamie Potter. Flitwick immediately sent a stunning spell hurtling towards Voldemort who pushed Jamie into the path of the spell. Rendered unconscious by the spell, the boy fell into the mirror which toppled to the floor, trapping the boy beneath it.

Flitwick fired off a second stunner which Voldemort easily dodged, returning a spell of his own at the same time. Flitwick dove out of the way but hadn't been quick enough; his leg was now badly damaged by Voldemort's reductor curse. Unable to get up, he became an easy target for Voldemort.

"Crucio." Flitwick's screams echoed around the room as he thrashed about in agony. His screams suddenly stopped as he hit his head on a pillar, rendering him unconscious.

After escorting the injured group back to the safety of the third floor, Severus hurried to aid Flitwick. When he came through the entrance to the final chamber, Flitwick was lying unconscious on the floor, and Quirrell was leaning over an unmoving Potter who was trapped beneath a huge mirror. "If you won't help me, then you're going to die Potter."

Severus raised his wand to attack Quirrell and then stopped. A tiny voice in his head urged him to let Potter die. He hated the boy almost as much as he had hated his father. In the moment of Severus' hesitation, Quirrell became aware of the fact that he had company.

"Ah, Severus Snape, it comes down to you and me. We could have been allies, you and I. You should have joined me when you had the chance instead of fleeing to Dumbledore like a coward. No matter, for I'm going to kill you now, and take the stone." Voldemort sounded supremely confident.

At that moment Flitwick, who had regained consciousness, shot off a stunning spell which distracted Voldemort. Severus, who decided he wasn't going to take the chance of Voldemort getting the stone, shot off his own spell. The spell impacted squarely upon his intended target and he watched in satisfaction as Quirrell's head exploded into a myriad of tiny pieces.

Flitwick sat on the floor stunned. He had intended to subdue Quirrell, not kill him but that choice had now been taken out of his hands. Both men were horrified to see Quirrell's body crumble to dust before their eyes. Voldemort's spirit had departed and left the man to die.

Dumbledore entered the room at that moment. The wards he had set up to let him know when someone had entered the trapdoor had been triggered more than an hour earlier. He had returned from the Ministry in the hope that he would find Jamie Potter battling Voldemort. Instead, he was horrified to see Jamie lying on the floor covered with the mirror; Flitwick propped up against a pillar bleeding from his leg and Severus standing over the desiccated body of what he presumed was Quirrell.

Quickly Dumbledore levitated the mirror off Jamie's body; the boy's moan paid testament to the fact that he was still alive. Unfortunately the mirror was cracked, which meant that he would be unable to retrieve the stone from it. He didn't know how he was going to explain this to Nicolas.

A few days later

Dumbledore wasn't surprised when a tall, dark-haired man entered the infirmary. The castle's wards had alerted him to the man's presence as soon as he had stepped inside the front door. "What can I do for you, Healer Delaney?"

"I've come to take Jamie home. Lily's isn't too happy about what's happened, especially with it coming so soon after the Forbidden Forest incident."

Dumbledore smiled in a conciliatory fashion. "I thought that might be the case. His things are being packed as we speak. His friends will be sorry that he will miss the train journey back with them."

"Lily was insistent. She wants her son home with her where she can keep an eye on him. Can you provide me with a portkey home or do I need to floo out?" Craig asked.

Dumbledore picked up a magazine, spoke the incantation to change it into a portkey and passed it to Craig. "Just say 'home' when you are ready to go."

Craig walked over to Jamie's bed where he took a hold of the sleeping boy's hand. He turned to face Dumbledore. "Thank you. Home." The man and boy then disappeared.

Dumbledore sighed and headed back to his office. He had something to do that he had been putting off since discovering the mirror had been damaged.

Back in his office, Dumbledore threw some floo powder into the fireplace and called out "Nicolas Flamel". Nicolas' face soon appeared in the flames. "Do you mind if I step through?" Dumbledore asked.

"Not at all, old friend." Flamel responded, before pulling out of the fire to allow Dumbledore passage.

Dumbledore stepped out of the fireplace and into Nicolas' study. It was overstuffed with the many things Flamel had amassed over time. Instead of trying to distract himself, Dumbledore decided that he had better just come right out with it.

"I've lost the stone. I placed it inside the Mirror of Erised which was damaged when Voldemort tried to recover the stone." Dumbledore looked at the floor, unable to meet his friend's eyes.

Flamel laughed, his own eyes twinkling. "Sorry Albus, but did you really think I'd hand over the real stone?"

Albus was stunned. His friend hadn't trusted him? "But I thought..."

Flamel interrupted. "I know you only had good intentions but I couldn't risk the stone falling into Riddle's hands."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Dumbledore demanded.

"And spoil my fun! After being alive this long, I have to look for new ways to amuse myself." Flamel smirked. He knew this would annoy Albus, but heck, he was 665 and needed a little diversion every now and then.

Dumbledore was staggered. The false stone had been given to him for a joke! Hiding his anger, he smiled at Flamel. "No harm done. At least the stone's safe. Where is it, by the way?"

Flamel just tapped the side of his nose with his finger. "Need to know basis only, Albus, need to know."

"Well, now that I know everything is okay, I'd best be on my way." Dumbledore took his leave and departed via the fireplace.

Flamel watched as Dumbledore vanished from the flames, and his wife, Peri, came into the room. "So he's gone then?" she asked.

"Yes. I don't think he was very happy though."

"That's just too bad. You know as well as I do that that man isn't to be trusted."

"Peri, I know. Let's go pass our findings down to the team."

The fireplace was once more put into operation as Peri and Nicolas flooded out to report in.

Thanks to Knight25 for being my 100th reviewer and for providing me with the false stone/Nicolas Flamel scenario which I am pleased to say gave me some great ideas to use later in this story.

The next chapter will cover summer break - it may include some Severus/Virginie and Remus information - I haven't quite decided yet. After that year 2 begins.

Chapter 15: Summer

January 1992

Mack watched as his daughter left his office. He'd just spent the last hour listening to her weep as she had told him that she'd slept with a married man. He had wanted to rip the bastard limb from limb as he'd listened to her pour her heart out. He was a little surprised though that she'd left it this long to tell him but when she'd explained, he'd understood.

She'd tried to distance herself from the guy but when circumstances had conspired to throw her back into his path again, she'd come to the conclusion that it would be better for everyone if she completely cut herself off from not only the man, but also his wife. Mack knew that guilt had been a major factor in his daughter's decision.

Mack picked up the phone. "Artie. It's Mack. I need a favor. My daughter needs to disappear for a while. She's got involved with the wrong guy; the sort who doesn't know how to take a hint."

Mack listened to the man at the other hand of the line. "Money's no object; whatever it takes to get it done. She needs some time and space to get herself together, and she can't do that with this asshole still chasing after her." To Mack, the cost of doing this for his daughter was irrelevant. He was close to being a billionaire so it wasn't as if the money would make any kind of dent in his bank account.

After exchanging a few pleasantries, Mack hung up. He knew that removing all traces of his daughter was something of an extreme measure, but he didn't want Lupin sniffing around his baby girl any more.

Mack blamed himself. He knew Johanna had hated working at the foundations he ran and had wanted to achieve something for herself. He'd liked the idea that she hadn't been content to just sit at home and spend his money. He'd therefore encouraged her when she'd found a job working for a local couple looking after their children. To be on the safe side, he'd run a perfunctory background into the family, which had come up clean. Hell, he'd even met the family a few times.

It was only when he'd been away on business, and he'd seen Remus Lupin with a woman who definitely bore no resemblance to his wife, that he had decided to dig a little deeper in Lupin's dealings. He'd known what kind of a man Remus Lupin was within a few days of his investigations, but there was nothing to suggest that the guy would be any threat to his daughter; the woman he'd hired to get close to Lupin had discovered that he liked to keep his affairs separate from his family. He'd pretty much pushed Lupin to the back of his mind as the years had gone by and nothing had happened. However, after his daughter's visit, he knew that if Lupin ever tried to mess with his daughter again, he'd kill him, and Mack didn't mean figuratively speaking.

19th June 1992

Ron ran to catch up with the headmaster. "Professor Dumbledore."

Albus stopped to let Ron move abreast of him. "What can I do for you, Mr. Prewett?"

"It's about Jamie." Ron looked nervous.

"Come into my office." Dumbledore led the way up the stairs.

"Please sit down. Lemon drop?" Dumbledore asked Ron.

Ron shook his head and plunged straight in. "Sir, I can't take money for being Jamie's friend any more."

"Why ever not?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"He really is my friend. I truly missed him when he was in St. Mungo's, and when we went after the stone, I would have done anything to help him to get it."

Dumbledore's eyes twinkled merrily. "Mr. Prewett, you proved your friendship and loyalty to Mr. Potter when you sacrificed yourself in order to allow him to continue to try and save the stone."

Ron blushed. "Then you're not angry."

"No, of course not. I'll stop the payments and this will remain our little secret." Dumbledore brought the discussion to an end.

"Thank you, Sir." Feeling relieved, Ron left the room.

Albus sat thinking about their discussion. When Ron had first accepted the money, he'd thought that he'd been right in his assessment that the boy had had few scruples, particularly in light of who his mother was. Albus was pleased that Ron had decided that friendship was more important than money; it made Ron even easier to manipulate, for he'd just happily admitted that he would do anything for his friend.

21st June 1992

"Neville, I'm so glad you're home. It's been boring having lessons without you." Seville complained.

"But I'm back now. We've got over two months to spend together." Neville hugged his little sister.

Unlike most brothers who complained about their siblings, Neville was highly protective of his sister. He sometimes felt that their mother pushed them aside in favor of her work. He knew that their grandmother cared about them, but she had a hard time making a connection with the children.

Neville turned his attention back to his sister, who was speaking to him again. "I miss Harry and Dudley as well. I know they only used to come at the weekend for lessons, but I still miss them."

Neville had an idea. "I know. Why don't I ask Mum if we can invite Harry and Dudley to stay during the holidays? I'd also like to invite another of my classmates."

"Which one?" Seville enquired.

Neville blushed. "Hermione Snape, she made friends with me when I felt I didn't have any friends at school."

"But what about Harry and Dudley? You had them." Seville argued.

Neville shook his head. "I was an idiot at the start of the year and pretty much ignored Harry and Dudley in favor of being friends with Potter."

"What happened?" Seville was thirsty for knowledge. Even though Neville had written to her during the year, his letters had been short and had contained very little interesting gossip.

"Potter and his friend, Ron Prewett, took my remembrall."

Seville giggled at this point. She knew how bad Neville's memory was, and that their Gran had sent the remembrall to him in an effort to make Neville's life a little easier.

"As I was saying..." Neville smiled at his sister's cheeky grin. "They took my remembrall and were playing catch with it on their brooms. It was our first flying lesson; you know how much I hate flying. I had to fly up to try and get it. They threw it into the air and it fell towards the ground. Hermione caught it and then defended me against them."

"She sounds nice. Is she in Gryffindor with you?" Seville asked.

"No, she's a Slytherin." Neville enjoyed watching the shock race across his sister's face. "She's also my best friend."

Seville was speechless. She couldn't believe her brother was friends with a Slytherin.

Neville continued. "She accepted me as a friend and let me join her study group. Harry and Dudley are part of the group. Most of the school calls us the Outcasts."

Seville interrupted. "Is Hermione the leader of the group?"

Neville shook his head. "No, I suppose Harry is."

“Who else is in this group?”

Neville thought about it. “Well, there’s Hermione’s friend from Slytherin, Daphne Greengrass, and from Ravenclaw there are two other girls, Su Li and Padma Patil.” At this point Neville sniggered.

“Why you are laughing?” Seville demanded to know.

“Dudley has a crush on Padma; that’s the only reason she and Su Li are in the group. He asked them to join.”

“Don’t be mean, Neville.” Seville reprimanded her brother.

Their conversation was brought to a premature end when their grandmother came into the room; their aunt and uncle had arrived to take tea with them. Dutifully the two children brushed their hair, washed their hands and followed their grandmother down to the formal sitting room.

Letters

“Dear Harry and Dudley,

Seville has been moaning that she misses you. I’ve asked Mum and she said that I can invite you to stay for two weeks. Will your Mum and Dad let you come? Mum said anytime is fine except for the last week before school starts. Please say you will. I’m going to write to Hermione and ask if she can visit once I know that you can.

Write soon.

Neville

Dear Nev,

Mum and Dad have said yes! If it’s okay we will come on 18th July after dinner. We’ve got to be back on 31st July; Mum doesn’t want to miss Harry’s birthday. Dudley said thanks for his birthday present;

Bertie Botts are his favorite. Tell Sevvie we miss her. See you on the 18th.

Harry and Dudley

23rd June 1992

Jamie's trunk had just been delivered from Hogwarts. Even though she could have asked a house elf to do it for her, Lily preferred to do some things herself, including packing and unpacking Jamie's things. She opened up the trunk. There, on the top, were some ruined pieces of clothing which she supposed must have come from Jamie's adventure on the third floor. The elves must not have known what to do with them. Lily picked up the ruined trousers and was about to throw them into the trash when she realized that there was something in the pocket. She put it in her hand and pulled out a red, rough looking stone. Jamie had told her everything about going after the Philosopher's Stone, and how Professor Dumbledore had told him that it had been lost. She wondered if this might be the missing stone.

Lily pocketed the stone and headed downstairs to her husband's study, where she knocked on the door.

"Come in." A voice came from within the study.

Lily went into the study. It was decorated in dark wooden paneling and medical texts filled the bookshelves. "Darling, look what I found in Jamie's pocket. Do you think it might be the stone he went after?"

"I'm not sure. Leave it with me and I'll look into it." He took the stone from Lily, pulled her into his arms and kissed her hard on the lips, before patting her bottom and pushing her gently out of his study.

Lily left with a silly grin on her face thinking. "What a guy!"

A week later

"Jamie." Lily called out.

His face suddenly appeared at the top of the stairs. "Yes Mum?"

“Can you come down here for a moment?”

Jamie ran down to where his mother stood. She held out her hand. In it sat a red rough looking stone. “Your Dad asked me to give this back to you.”

Jamie took the stone from his mother. “It looks like the stone I saw in the mirror.”

“I found it in your pocket when I was unpacking and asked your Dad to look at it.”

“I didn’t even know I had it.” Jamie’s face became animated.

Lily’s words put a damper on his enthusiasm. “Well, I shouldn’t get too excited. Apparently it’s a fake. Your Dad ran some tests on it, and it’s nothing more than a red piece of rock.”

“I wonder why I had a red piece of rock in my pocket.” Jamie murmured.

Lily just shook her head. “Who knows? Perhaps You-Know-How was intending to swap it with the real stone and dropped it.”

Jamie nodded. “You must be right. Even though I don’t remember picking it up, I’ll think I’ll keep it. It can be a reminder of my adventure.”

“Yes, well try not to have any more. Two trips to St. Mungo’s are more than enough in one year.” Lily shuddered when she thought about how she might have lost her son.

Jamie hugged his mother and ran off to write a letter to Ron.

Dear Ron

Guess what? Mum found a red rock in my pocket from our night on the third floor. She got Dad to get it check thinking it might be the

Philosopher's Stone but it was just a fake. I'll bring it with me when I come to stay.

Sorry mate, Mum's calling me again. We're going to visit my aunt today, so I've got to go and get ready.

See you next week.

Jamie

25th June 1992

After receiving an invitation from Neville, Hermione went into her mother's room to ask her if she could go and spend some time with him. Virginie was sitting propped up in bed reading a Dickens novel. She had been confined to bed ever since she nearly lost the baby in May. Severus had been beside him with worry, and had been treating her like spun glass ever since.

"Mama, can you spare me a moment?"

"What is it?" Virginie placed her book down and patted the bed beside her.

Hermione went and sat next to her mother.

"I've received a letter from Neville Longbottom asking me to visit this summer. I wanted to know if I had your permission to do so." Hermione explained.

"Isn't Neville the boy your father is always complaining about?" Virginie asked.

"Yes, but he's also my friend. Anyway, Neville no longer has to have remedial potions. Papa said his work was now no worse than the rest of his dunderhead classmates." Hermione giggled even as she defended Neville.

"Do you like Neville, Hermione?" Virginie asked, wondering if Hermione's defense of the boy meant more than she was letting on.

"Of course I do, he's my friend." Hermione responded.

Virginie shook her head. "I didn't mean like, I meant LIKE."

Hermione cottoned onto what her mother was trying to say. "Of course not, he's just my friend."

"Is anyone going to be going to stay with Neville?" her mother questioned Hermione.

"Yes, Dudley and Harry Lupin." Hermione said, blushing as she mentioned Harry's name.

Virginie saw the blush and hid her smile. No wonder her daughter didn't have any romantic feelings for Neville, she appeared to have a crush on Harry Lupin.

"Hermione, do you like Harry?"

"Of course, he's my best friend." Hermione refused to meet her mother's eyes, thus confirming Virginie's suspicions.

Virginie gently tilted Hermione's chin until her daughter couldn't avoid looking at her. "You really do like Harry, don't you?"

Hermione reluctantly nodded. "I know we're too young for that sort of thing yet, but he's really sweet and he has the nicest eyes."

"Hermione, it's perfectly normal for a girl of your age to have romantic feelings towards her male friends. It's all part of growing up." Virginie then grinned. "Just don't tell Harry you think his eyes are nice!"

"Why not?" For an intelligent girl, Hermione could sometimes be a little obtuse about the male gender.

"You might offend him. He's at that age when he wants to look all manly and grown up. Believe me, I know, having grown up with two brothers."

Hermione disagreed with her mother's assessment of Harry's manliness. "He's not that kind of boy, he's really kind and caring.

Virginie burst out laughing. "Well you know him better than me.

Hermione grinned at her mother. "Like I said, he's just really nice to me. He let me join him when I needed someone to study with."

Even though Virginie lived in Hogwarts for most of the year, she didn't really interact with the students and struggled as she tried to picture who Hermione was talking about. Then it clicked. "Your Harry wouldn't happen to be the Ravenclaw who ties back his hair, would he?"

Hermione's blush answered her question. Virginie now knew for definite who Harry Lupin was. She was surprised however that Hermione had a crush on the boy; Harry was a little overweight and had to be several inches shorter than her daughter. After her rather uncharitable thought, Virginie mentally scolded herself; she, off all people, should know better than to judge someone by their appearance alone. Hermione had been right about one thing though; the boy had the most stunning pair of blue eyes she had ever seen. Virginie had one more question for her daughter. "Why does he wear his hair up? It's a very adult style for so young a boy."

"I know. I did ask him and he said that if he leaves it short, it sort of looks all messy and he can't do anything with it." Hermione obliged her mother's nosiness.

"Now about Neville and his offer." Virginie changed the subject; after all the discussion about Harry, her daughter was now sporting a rather flushed face. "If you don't mind I would like to see the letter before I make my decision."

Hermione left the room and returned with her letter case from which she withdrew Neville's letter.

Virginie took the proffered letter and read it through.

"Dearest Hermione

How are you? I've really missed seeing you. I would love it if you could come and stay for a few weeks this summer. I've told my sister everything about you and she can't wait to meet you. Harry and Dudley Lupin will be arriving on 18th July and staying for two weeks. Please ask your parents if you can come, and write to let me know the answer.

Hope to see you soon.

Your friend

Neville

P.S. My Mum said to bring a couple of formal dresses and robes. We may be attending a couple of balls and some Ministry functions while you are here."

Virginie hid her frown as she finished reading the letter. "Do you have any letters from Harry that I could see?"

Hermione wondered why her mother wanted to see one of Harry's letters but she dutifully rummaged through her case and pulled one out, and passed it to her mother to read.

"Dear Hermione

Summer is great. I've done my homework. Have you finished yours yet? We can go over it, if you can get your Dad to let you go to Nev's this summer. Dudley says hi.

Harry"

After reading the two disparate letters, it appeared that Neville was harboring romantic feelings for her daughter; unfortunately it seemed equally apparent that Harry was not. Virginie just hoped that Hermione was not heading for heartbreak. Not wanting to upset her daughter, she decided not to say anything.

"I'm happy for you to visit Neville over the summer. Just don't mention to your father that Harry and Dudley will be there though. You know how he feels about their father. Simply tell him about it after your visit." Virginia smiled conspiratorially at her daughter.

Leaving her mother to her reading, Hermione packed up her letters and went off to check the homework she had already completed. After re-reading Harry's letter, she decided that she had better be prepared; Harry could be a little competitive when it came to schoolwork.

28th June 1992

Remus had been relieved when the boys had received an invitation to go stay with the Longbottoms. Things between him and Nia had now reached an all-time low. For the sake of the children, they were trying to hide their problems but it hadn't been easy. He hadn't told Nia yet but he had tendered his resignation at the local school. He had been loath to do it; the school had been wonderful to him. To cover for his absences during the full moon, he had told them that he required occasional blood transfusions for a minor medical problem, and they had been very supportive of his needs. After teaching summer classes, he would be returning to his original vocation, that of a substitute teacher. It would get him away from the house, and, more importantly, away from Nia, during the week.

Checking that Nia wasn't around, Remus picked up the phone and dialed. "This is Remus Lupin. Is it possible to speak to Helen Grady?"

"Helen Grady speaking."

"Hi Helen. It's Remus Lupin. I was wondering whether you had had any luck yet tracing Johanna Gregory for me."

"I'm afraid not. I've checked with her neighbors at the address you gave me. They said they never ever saw her around. Her cell and home phone numbers were registered to a Mary-Sue Doe; a pseudonym if ever I heard one. However, they've both been disconnected since the middle of January."

“How can she just disappear?” Remus asked, speaking more to himself than to the private investigator at the other end.

“I’m sorry. I’m one of the best in this field and I have to admit, I’m mystified. I can’t find any records for her at all; no bank details, school records, or employment data. Do you want me to continue to look for her?” Helen really was at a dead end. She’d had to admit she’d been a little alarmed; this was the second time Lupin had hired her to look for a woman who had disappeared without a trace.

“I guess not. You sound as if you’ve pretty much exhausted your options.” Remus thanked the investigator and hung up.

After waking up next to Johanna, Remus had been flooded with feelings of guilt and regret, and had fled. He’d buried all thoughts of her deep down, telling himself that sleeping with her had been a mistake. However, after seeing Johanna at Christmas, Remus had admitted to himself that he still wanted her. Once she’d returned from Florida, he’d left numerous messages on both her answering machine and cell phone, hoping she’d call him back. After a few weeks, he’d given up on the calls and had gone round to her house, only to find it empty. Having no further leads, he’d hired a private investigator he’d used before to try and find her, but to no avail. It was as if she had never existed.

“Remus, are you home?” Nia’s voice disturbed his reverie.

“Yes, but I’m just on my way out. I’ll see you later okay. Don’t wait up; the PTA meeting may take a while.” Remus didn’t meet his wife’s eyes as he disappeared out of the door.

Later that night as Nia lay in bed, she laid her hand on the empty space where Remus usually slept. She knew that there was no PTA meeting that evening. He thought that she didn’t know about his tawdry one night stands, but she did.

4th June 1988

“Pet, it’s wonderful you could make it tonight.” Sarah Collins, one of Nia’s old school friends, drew Nia into a hug.

"I know, I know, I kept promising to go out with you for a girl's night out but I just feel too old." Nia smiled at her friend who even now still refused to call her anything but Pet.

"Rubbish. Just because you've got all those kids doesn't make you old. Come on, let's find a pub and get a drink." Sarah took hold of Nia's arm and dragged her off towards the nearest bar.

Nia had been having a wonderful time until she heard a laugh she thought she recognized coming from several booths behind her and Sarah.

"Pet, do you want another drink?" Sarah smiled happily at her friend.

"I think I'll try a gin and tonic. Actually, make it a double!" Nia had a feeling she was going to need it.

Sarah left to go to the bar, and Nia pulled out her vanity mirror. Standing up, she looked into the mirror at the reflection of the room behind her. She was right; she had known that laugh. It was Remus, and he was not alone. He had his arm around an attractive redhead, who was laughing at something he had said. Legs shaking, Nia sat down. She wished Sarah would hurry, she really needed that drink.

Sarah returned. "Are you okay Pet? You've gone awfully pale."

"It's nothing; I'm just a little hungry." Nia lied, taking several large gulps of her gin and tonic.

"Well it's a good job I've ordered us some food then." Sarah said, not realizing that food was the last thing Nia actually really wanted.

"Will you excuse me? I'm just going to pop to the ladies." Nia got up and made her way to the back of the pub. A wall separated the back of the booth where Remus was seated, from the walkway to the bathrooms. Nia stood there for a moment, listening to Remus' voice. At any other time she would have expected him to be able to pick out her scent, but luckily the pub was full and smoky, which would help mask her aroma; not to say anything of the perfume she had liberally

doused herself in. Not wanting to, but unable to move, she listened as the woman started speaking.

“As I said earlier, my husband is out of the country on business, and except for my cat, I’m all alone. This might be a bit forward of me but I was wondering if you wanted to come back to my place and watch a movie with me?” The woman managed to sound vulnerable and sexy at the same time.

“Is it nearby?” Remus asked as he casually played with the woman’s hair.

“About ten minutes away, why?”

“Because I think I want to be alone with you sooner, rather than later.” Remus bent his head to place a kiss on the woman’s bare shoulder.

“How do you know I’m that kind of girl?” The woman’s voice now sounded sultry and breathless.

“Because good girls don’t put their hands where yours are now.” Remus laughed and tangled his fingers in the woman’s hair to pull her forward for a hungry kiss. Releasing her, he stood up. “Let’s get out of here.”

Remus never once looked round as he got up. If he had, he would have seen Nia leaning up against the back wall of the pub, frozen in place.

Nia watched as the couple left, Remus’ arm around the woman’s waist; his hand firmly placed on her bottom.

She had gone back to her friend, a false smile pasted on her face. The rest of the evening had passed by in a blur. She had been glad to escape and get back home to Johanna and the children. Only once she had gained the sanctuary of her bedroom had she let herself cry.

Back to the present

Nia withdrew her hand. She knew he would always come back to her for she had something those women didn't; his children. After switching off the light, she rolled over and went to sleep.

1st July 1992

Gilderoy Lockhart was staring into the mirror, and was about to ask it for its opinion on his new hairstyle, when a knock sounded at the door. After pausing to peek at his lovely locks just one more time, Gilderoy walked off to see who was calling. The mirror breathed a sigh of relief; it knew its purpose was to serve but it wished that it had been bought by someone other than the prancing popinjay who was now opening the front door.

"Gilderoy, how wonderful to see you."

"Professor Dumbledore. What brings you here?" Gilderoy racked his brains trying to remember if he had forgotten a meeting.

"I was in the neighborhood and have a favor to ask of you. May I come in?" Dumbledore wore his most convivial smile.

Thinking that the Professor probably just wanted his autograph or to discuss his latest book, Gilderoy opened the door wider, allowing the Professor to step inside.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Gilderoy fancied a small tot of rum himself, and he hoped that Dumbledore would be of a similar leaning.

"I wouldn't mind a cup of tea." Dumbledore hid his smile; Gilderoy was too easy to read, and besides, his drinking habits were almost legendary.

Gilderoy called to his house elf, Mimsy, who was soon back with the beverage of choice for Dumbledore. "If you'll excuse me, I'm not too fond of tea."

Gilderoy headed over to his drinks cabinet and poured himself a tumbler full of rum which he raised in a salute to Dumbledore. "Now tell me, Professor, what can I do for you?"

"I'd like you to come to Hogwarts as the new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher." Dumbledore put down his teacup.

Gilderoy shook his head. "That's impossible. I'm leaving for America at the end of August to promote my new book, *Magical Me*. Have you read it?"

"I'm afraid not. Unfortunately I'm going to have to deprive the citizens of America of your presence, as you will be resuming your new position at Hogwarts." Dumbledore's face had now lost any sign of the geniality it had wore when he first arrived.

"Why should I give up my book tour to teach children?" Gilderoy flicked his head, sending his golden mane flying over his shoulder.

"Because if you don't, I'd be happy to publish a book of my own. In it I could detail all the names of the people whose heroic deeds you appropriated as your own." Dumbledore had stumbled across several witnesses who had seen Gilderoy obliterating his victims.

Gilderoy went white. "But how...?"

"Does it matter? Thank you for the wonderful hospitality, Gilderoy. I'll be seeing you on the 1st of September." Dumbledore stood up to leave.

Panicking slightly and knowing he had little choice in the matter, Gilderoy made a desperate attempt to take back control of the situation. "I'll do it on one condition."

"Which is?"

"You let me teach from my books."

Dumbledore pondered the request for a moment. It wouldn't hurt to pander to the fop's demand. Dumbledore didn't really care as long as

he had a teacher to fill the DADA spot. "That is acceptable for the first through third years. However, for the fourth years and up, you will adhere to the Ministry guidelines."

Lockhart agreed immediately. "Yes, of course. It's just unfortunate that the other years will miss out on my wonderful adventures. Perhaps I could arrange for a private reading for them."

Dumbledore just shook his head in amazement and left. He had a second teacher to interview that day.

Anna Jameson entered the Leaky Cauldron from the muggle side, coughing slightly as she breathed in the somewhat smoky atmosphere. Professor Dumbledore was talking to Tom, the barman but turned at her entrance.

"Excuse me Tom, but I think this may be the young lady I was waiting for." Dumbledore strode across the room to greet Anna.

"I'm Albus Dumbledore. I hope I am correct in thinking that you are Anna Jameson." Albus held out his hand, which the witch shook.

"You are. I'm pleased to meet you." Anna smiled prettily.

As Anna's eyes met his, Dumbledore was shocked to see that they were clear amber. If he had had other candidates for the position, he wouldn't have bothered continuing the interview; a werewolf on his staff was the last thing he needed. However, a new Ministry mandate had stated that if he was unable to fill any vacant teaching position, they would fill it for him. Albus preferred to choose his own staff.

"I've arranged for a private room; shall we?" Albus led the way upstairs and into the private room Tom had set up for the meeting. "May I offer you some refreshments, Miss Jameson?"

"Thank you. I'd like a glass of white wine if you have it; if not, a butterbeer will be fine. And please, call me Anna." The woman sank graciously onto a chair.

Albus passed the glass of wine to the woman, and poured himself a firewhiskey.

Before Albus had a chance to say anything, Anna raised her unusual eyes up to him and spoke. "I saw you were a little startled at my eyes."

"Yes, I'm not sure how happy I am at employing a werewolf on my staff." Dumbledore looked apologetically at the woman for mentioning her condition.

Anna laughed and shook her head. "I'm not a werewolf. My great-grandfather was though. I'm the only one in my family to have inherited his amber eyes."

Albus was now thoroughly relieved. "I'm sorry. That was rude of me."

Anna decided to be open with the Professor; she really wanted this position. "Not at all. I may not be a werewolf but I do have some of their characteristics such as enhanced strength and excellent eyesight and hearing. Fortunately, for I can't abide strong smells, I didn't inherit the keen sense of smell that comes with being a werewolf. May I ask why the last Professor is leaving?"

"Charity wanted to spend more time with her family."

Satisfied with Dumbledore's response, Anna withdrew a sheaf of papers from her briefcase. "I have looked over the notes you sent me and the books Professor Burbage was teaching from. I think I have managed to improve on her lessons; some of them were a little outdated." Anna passed the papers across to Dumbledore.

After scanning the papers, Dumbledore held out his hand to Anna. "I believe I have just found the new Muggle Studies teacher."

"I believe you have." After shaking hands with Dumbledore, Anna stood and replaced her notes into her briefcase.

"I will see you on 1st September, Anna. I believe you wanted to ride with the students on the Hogwarts Express."

"If that is permissible. As I attended a private school, I never had the opportunity to ride it as a child." Anna's real intention was to size up the pupils before she saw them in a school setting.

"I am always happy to have extra supervision on the train. Thank you and I will see you in September." Dumbledore inclined his head slightly and followed Anna out of the door.

24th July 992

Hermione watched as the three boys flew around Neville's grounds on their brooms. Harry had been using the last few days to help Neville gain confidence in the air. Hermione was surprised at how good Harry actually was on a broom, never having shared any flying lessons with the Ravenclaws. Suddenly Harry swooped down towards the ground and fell to his knees. Hermione jumped up and ran across to him.

"Harry, are you hurt?" Hermione put her hand on Harry's shoulder.

Harry just shook his head. "No, I've just lost one of my contacts."

"I didn't know you wore contacts." Hermione was surprised; she hadn't realized that Harry needed glasses.

Harry looked up and Hermione gasped. "Harry, you've got a green eye."

"Actually I've got two." Harry smirked, and then his hand shot out into the grass. "Found it!"

"Guys, I'm just going to go and clean this lens before I put it back in. I'll be back in a while." Harry yelled out to Dudley and Neville, who were still circling the grounds.

Hermione trailed Harry to his room, but stopped at the door. "May I come in?"

“Sure. I’m just going to clean this in the bathroom.” Harry disappeared into his bathroom.

Hermione looked around the room. It was very tidy for a boy. Her brother’s room was never this clean.

Harry came back in. “There, that’s better.” Harry’s eyes were now back to his usual blue.

“Harry, why do you wear colored contacts?” Hermione wanted to know.

He shrugged. “I don’t like my original eye color.”

“But they’re gorgeous.” Hermione then felt embarrassed that she’d blurted it out.

Harry decided that he might as well tell Hermione the truth; she’d just nag at him until he spilled the beans otherwise. “I feel really stupid telling you why I have blue contacts.”

“It can’t be that bad.” Hermione encouraged him.

As he told her, Harry’s face colored to a becoming pink. “When I was smaller, I had a nanny called Johanna. She was basically my hero. She took Dudley and me ice-skating, to the movies and played games with us. I always thought that she had the most beautiful blue eyes. However, it came as a bit of a shock when I found out that her eyes weren’t naturally that color. She explained that she didn’t like her natural eye color and that was why she wore colored contact lens. At that age I wanted to be just like her, so I begged and begged until Dad finally said yes to colored contacts. I’ve been wearing them ever since.”

Harry now looked very uncomfortable; he’d never told anyone the real reason for wanting his blue contacts. He just hoped she wouldn’t laugh at him.

Hermione decided to try and make Harry feel a little better about his childhood crush by sharing one of her secrets. “When I was five I had

a blue stuffed dragon. I took it everywhere with me. I was heartbroken when I couldn't find it one day. Papa bought me another one, which I still sleep with even now."

Harry smiled at Hermione's effort to lessen his discomfort. Deciding he needed to get out of the room before he embarrassed himself any further, he grabbed Hermione's hand. "Come on, let's get back to the others."

Hermione's heart jumped a little when Harry took her hand. Perhaps Harry liked her as much as she liked him; he'd shared his secret with her after all. Beaming, Hermione allowed Harry to continue to hold her hand all the way back to the grounds.

Neville spotted the two coming out of the house. His face fell a little when he saw the pair holding hands. "Hey, Harry, over here."

Neville watched as Harry jogged over to him still holding onto Hermione. "Can I ask you something?"

Harry nodded. "Sure."

"Are you two, you know?" Neville said, not quite sure how to put his question into words.

"You know what?" Harry asked.

Neville went red. "You know, like boyfriend and girlfriend."

Harry let go of Hermione's hand and chortled. "Me and Hermione? What gives you that idea?"

"You were holding hands when you came out."

"Neville, Hermione's just like you and Dudley, one of my best friends." Harry shook his head in amusement as he mounted his broom. Shooting one final grin at Hermione, he took off.

Hermione felt as though her heart was breaking. Harry only thought of her as a friend? She then realized that Neville was speaking to her.

“Hermione, now I know that Harry isn’t your boyfriend, would you please be my partner for the Ministry Grand Ball next week?” Neville looked nervous as he waited for her response.

“I’d be delighted to, Neville.” To her own ears her voice sounded brittle, but Neville didn’t seem to have noticed, he was just too happy she had accepted his invitation.

“That’s great Hermione.” Neville smiled shyly at her before remounting his own broom and flying off to join Harry and Dudley.

Hermione walked slowly back to the house and up to her room. She sat down heavily, tears trickling down her cheeks. She’d really hoped that Harry liked her as much she did him. She knew that she didn’t like Neville in the same way as she did Harry but when Neville had asked her to the ball, he’d looked so hopeful waiting for her answer that she hadn’t been able to refuse him. Wiping her tears away, she headed for the bathroom to wash her face.

Later that night, Hermione excused herself early and went to bed. She had found it difficult to be in the same room as Harry. Harry had noticed how quiet Hermione had become and had followed her back to her room.

A knock at the door startled Hermione, who had just gotten undressed. “Who is it?”

“It’s me, Harry.” Harry’s tentative voice came through the door.

“Just a moment.” Hermione ran round frantically as she looked for her robe. “Come in.”

Harry poked his head around the door to see that Hermione was bundled up in a large furry robe. “Can I talk to you?”

Hermione nodded, her heart pounding.

“You seemed a little quiet at dinner. Is anything wrong?” Harry asked.

Unable to speak, Hermione just shook her head.

"You know you can tell me anything, don't you? You told me about your problems with your Dad. Whatever's the matter can't be worse than that." Hermione still didn't say anything, so Harry continued to speak. "It's true what I told Neville you know. You're my friend; my best friend."

Hermione sucked in a mouthful of air. "I'm fine, Harry. Just tired." Then she ruined her performance by bursting into tears.

Harry fully entered the room, shutting the door behind him and strode over to Hermione. "Come here."

Hermione let herself be held by Harry. Harry moved the two of them over to the sofa and sat down with Hermione on his lap. She continued to cry.

"Please tell me what's wrong. Is it your Dad?" Harry hated seeing girls cry.

Hermione shook her head, and took a deep breath. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?"

"Because it's too embarrassing." Hermione howled.

"You can tell me anything. I told you about my most embarrassing thing." Harry said, trying to persuade the girl to open up to him.

"I like someone who doesn't like me back." Hermione hiccupped as she spoke.

"How do you know that they don't like you back?" Harry tried to think of who she could be talking about.

"I just do." Hermione's bottom lip trembled slightly.

Harry just continued to rock the girl, trying to alleviate her distress. "If he can't see what a wonderful person you are, then he must be really stupid."

Harry's comment had the opposite effect to what he had intended. Hermione burst into tears again, crying harder than before. Eventually she quieted down as the storm passed. Harry then noticed that she had gone limp in his arms. Carefully lifting up her hair to look at her face, he saw that she'd cried herself into an exhausted sleep. He couldn't just leave her alone, not when she had been so upset; so Harry settled back on the sofa, tilting Hermione so that her head now rested on the sofa arm and her legs were slung across his lap. Feeling worn out Harry decided to take a nap; his nightmares had returned after he had left Hogwarts and he hadn't been sleeping well. Feeling safe and warm, he fell asleep.

Hermione was woken up by someone screaming for their father. It was only then that she realized that she was lying on top of the person in question. Her memories flooded back from the previous night. Hermione slipped off Harry to kneel down at the side of the sofa.

"Harry, Harry, wake up." Hermione shook Harry by the shoulder, only for Harry's hand to snake out and grab her by the throat, as he shot up into a sitting position.

Coming fully awake, Harry realized that he had his hand wrapped around Hermione's neck. Quickly he pulled his hand away. "Oh Merlin, I'm so sorry. Are you okay?"

Harry hadn't really hurt her; he'd let go before he had done any major damage. "I'm fine. What about you?"

"I'm okay. I've had nightmares like this since I was small." Harry sounded completely matter of fact.

"You were shouting for your father." Hermione told him. "Do you want me to ask Mrs. Longbottom to fetch him for you?"

Harry shook his head. "I used it by now and it's usually always the same nightmare."

"It's always exactly the same?" Hermione questioned Harry.

"Yes, until tonight." Harry decided to confide in Hermione. Normally he would talk to his Dad until his distress from the nightmare had faded. "I'm always standing in a field unable to move and unable to make out the faces of anyone around me. I can't move as person after person drops to the floor. Then I suddenly find myself in a circle reaching out for someone who is always just out of reach. Then everything goes black."

"What was different about tonight?"

"I could see the person I was trying to reach out to." Harry looked disturbed.

"Who was it?"

"Your Dad."

"Papa?" Hermione wanted to make sure she had heard Harry correctly.

"Yes, he looked different though."

"How?"

Harry didn't really want to say. "He just looked different."

Hermione let it drop; Harry was talking again. "But why would I suddenly start seeing your Dad in my dream? For years I've not been able to see who was there."

"Perhaps it's because you had been talking to me before you went to sleep." A thought occurred to Hermione. "Why were you sleeping in here?"

"I didn't want to leave you on your own." Harry sounded a little defensive. "Look, I'd better go to my room. I'll see you in the morning."

"Thanks for staying with me." Hermione called out as he left.

"It wasn't a problem." Harry waved off her thanks and closed the door behind him. It was only when he had gotten into bed and was about to go to sleep that he remembered Hermione hadn't told him who it was that she liked. He wondered if it was Dudley. Yawning, Harry pulled the covers over his head thinking that she'd tell him eventually; after all he was her best friend.

5th August 1992

Hermione kept her father company in the gardens of Snape Estate. Her mother had gone into labor early that morning, and as usual, Severus had headed out to his favorite spot to await the arrival of his new child.

"Papa?" Hermione tried to distract her father.

"Yes, Hermione?" Severus was only half listening to his daughter, his gaze turning constantly up towards the wing where he knew his wife was bringing their child into the world.

"Did Mama ever tell you about my birth?" Up until the previous Christmas, Hermione had just presumed that her birth had been the same as her siblings' births had been; her father pacing the gardens, while her mother was tended to by the midwife upstairs.

Tearing his eyes away from the building, Severus gave his daughter his full attention. "Of course she did. Would you like to hear about it?"

"If it's alright." In anticipation, Hermione sat down on one of the stone benches that lined the walkways on the Estate.

Severus joined his daughter. "Your mother said that you couldn't wait come to out; almost as if you were eager to get here and find out what you were missing."

Hermione grinned at her father's description.

"Your mother was only in labor with you for just over an hour. Your birth father, Daniel Granger, had to drive your mother to a muggle hospital. Apparently they only just made it in time. She said that when you were born you had the most hair she had ever seen on a baby, and the loudest cry. I wish I had been there to see it."

Hermione hugged her father. "Me too."

A pop signaled the arrival of Bright, Virginie's elf. "Master Snape. Baby is here. You is to come now."

Letting go of his daughter, Severus jumped up and ran in the direction of Virginie's bedroom. Hermione just smiled and followed at a slightly more dignified speed. She wanted to give her parents a few moments alone before she invaded their privacy. Her siblings were staying with Minerva McGonagall for a few days but Hermione had refused to go.

As she entered the house, everything was quiet. Obviously her new sibling was a lot quieter than she had been at her birth. On reaching her parents' room, she knocked quietly on the door.

"Come in", Severus called out.

On opening the door, Hermione found her father sitting on the bed with his arm around her mother. At her mother's breast a tiny baby was suckling as it enjoyed its first meal.

"It's okay, Hermione, you can come in and take a look at your new brother." Her mother sounded tired but happy.

Approaching the bed, Hermione went and sat in the chair next to her mother, watching the baby feed. "Wow that was quick. I didn't know that babies had their first meal that quickly." Hermione was fascinated. She hadn't seen her other siblings after their births until they were a few days old.

"You were the same. This little one started rooting around as soon as he was placed on me." Virginie yawned. Even though it hadn't been a long labor, she was still feeling exhausted.

"I think your mother needs some sleep, Hermione." Severus looked tenderly at his wife.

Hermione kissed her mother and the baby, who had now finished eating. "I'll see you later, Mama and..." Hermione trailed off.

"Dominic Silas" Severus filled his daughter in on his new son's name.

"Dominic, that's a nice name." Hermione smiled at her parents and left to go write to her siblings and friends.

"Dear Seb and Liv,

We have a new baby brother called Dominic Silas. He is sleeping at the moment. I can't wait for you to see him. Papa said that you two will have to stay here at the Estate when we return to school, so you will have plenty of time to fuss over him.

Are you having a nice time at Aunt Minerva's? I almost wish I had gone when I think of the spells I could have asked her but I really wanted to be here when the baby came.

Just to warn you, Neville's little sister Seville is coming to stay next weekend, so you've got to be nice to her.

I'm missing you both.

Love

Your sister, Hermione xxx

Dear Herms,

Thanks for letting us know about Dom. Liv is really excited and can't wait to come home to play with the baby. It's been fun staying with Aunt Minerva. She's been showing us lots of fun tricks we can do with

our training wands. Uncle Filius came over yesterday and took everyone to Diagon Alley so that we could get something for the baby. He only went home this morning after staying up all night talking to Aunt Minerva.

I'm going to pack so that I am ready for when we come home. Liv said that she wants Seville to sleep in her room when she comes to stay.

Aunt Minerva is resting today so we are going to sit and practice our spells after we have packed.

We miss you as well.

Love

Seb (and Liv) xxxx

"Dear Harry

I have just seen my new brother, Dominic Silas Snape. He is so tiny and he hasn't got any hair yet! I am just glad that he didn't arrive until I came home from the Longbottoms.

Just be glad that you didn't have to go to the Ministry Ball. It was very boring. Neville's mother kept dragging me around to be introduced to different people. Pansy Parkinson from your House was there with the Malfoys. I've never really spoken to her before but I'm really glad she was there; she kept making funny comments about everyone's robes when the Malfoys couldn't hear her!

I even got to put my dancing lessons to some use. I had to dance with Matthias Malfoy who danced exquisitely. Neville danced with me a couple of times; my feet are still sore! Worst of all, I had to dance with Nott! That was one dance I would have happily missed. Blaise Zabini was there but thankfully we had to leave before I had to dance with him.

On the way back from Neville's home, Papa took me to spend my gift card from the Magical Menagerie that I had at Christmas and to get

my school books. I now have a wonderful new cat called Crookshanks, who's half-kneazle. I was going to buy a kitten, but I fell in love with Crookshanks at first sight. The poor little thing had been at the Menagerie for almost a year; nobody wanted him. He's coming to school with me when we return at the end of the month.

Mama is going to be staying at Snape Estate until Dominic is a bit bigger. Papa doesn't want him exposed to the cold of the dungeons, especially in the winter. I'll really miss Mama; Olivia and Seb will staying with her as well.

Sorry, I didn't ask. How are you? Say hello to Dudley for me. Did you have a nice birthday? I got your letter thanking me for the homework planner but you didn't say if you had a nice time.

I'll see you on the Hogwarts Express. Papa has said I can ride it to school again this year.

Love

Hermione

Dear Hermione

Congratulations on your new brother.

I had a great birthday. Dad and Mum took us all to TGI Fridays and then to the movies. Dudley says hello back.

I'll see you next month.

Harry

Dear Neville

Thank you so much for letting me stay last month; I enjoyed it very much. Please thank your mother and grandmother for their kind hospitality. Tell Sevvie I have written to her separately.

I have a new baby brother, Dominic. He was born a couple of hours ago. He will be staying here when I return to school with my new cat, Crookshanks.

I'll see you on the Hogwarts Express.

Best wishes.

Hermione

Dearest Hermione

I am so glad that you had a nice time during your stay here. My mother and grandmother send their best regards. Sevvie has already snatched her letter off me to go and read it. She was really thrilled to hear from you.

I'm really happy to hear the news about Dominic. I know you wanted another brother. Does he look like you?

I'm sorry that the ball was a bit boring but I am really glad that you were my partner. You looked really pretty.

I'm looking forward to meeting Crookshanks and seeing you on 1st September.

Love

Neville

Dear Seville

Thank you for being so nice to me when I stayed with your family last month. I would have felt left out if I had been the only girl. If your mother permits it, my parents have said that you may come and stay with me next weekend. I know you wanted to meet the new baby. Dominic was born today and I can't wait for you to meet him.

My parents are both looking forward to meeting you.

I'll see you soon.

Love

Hermione

Dear Hermione

I'm already packed. Mum said I can come to stay for one night next weekend. I'm really excited and can't wait to see Dominic.

Neville said you have a new cat as well. Say hello to Crookshanks for me.

See you next weekend.

Love

Seville xx

Black Manor, The Dowager House

31st August 1992

"Dear Draco

I hope that you have had a pleasant summer. This is the first real chance I have had to write to you.

I was surprised when you didn't come to the Grand Ball at the beginning of the month. I thought that it would be really boring but Hermione Snape was there with the Longbottoms. She really is rather nice. She has asked if I wanted to join her study group, the Outcasts. I am going to, and wondered if you would also like to join. I am sure she wouldn't mind.

Don't worry about writing back; we can talk tomorrow on the way back to school.

Love always,

Pansy

Draco put the letter down. He'd missed his friend over the summer. Usually they got together for a few weeks but that hadn't been possible this year. He had spent most of July in France with his mother visiting her family. Then Pansy had left for Italy with the Malfoys after the Grand Ball. Draco sometimes felt sad when he thought about his father. Lucius had disowned Draco after his mother had divorced him. He was glad that he had his Uncle Sirius, who often popped over to see him. His younger cousins were his only friends apart from Pansy and he had hoped to make more friends when he had started school last year.

That hadn't happened. Of the boys who shared his dormitory, he liked the Lupins and Terry Boot, but he hadn't really gotten to know them well. Goldstein was an idiot. Terry had friends in other houses and the Lupins were rarely ever in the common room. Draco picked up the letter again. He did really want to join the Outcasts but they'd only be letting him in because Pansy had asked them to. He'd rather be asked to join based on his own merits.

Sighing, Draco folded the letter up and placed it on top of the empty diary he had found amongst his school books on his return from Diagon Alley. He had mentioned it to his uncle, who had checked with the shopkeeper at Flourish & Blotts. No-one had lost a diary and the store didn't actually sell them, so Draco had decided to keep the diary. It would be handy for him to make notes in about his schoolwork. Knowing it was almost time for dinner, Draco closed the lid of his trunk and headed out of his room.

Chapter 16: Back to School

1st September 1992

Ginevra Prewett walked quickly onto the platform. Her brother and the Boy Who Lived weren't far behind her. She had been hoping to avoid them altogether but her mother had insisted that the two boys accompany her to the train station, together with Percy. She looked at Percy who was walking beside her and pulled a face. He just grinned; he already knew what she was thinking.

When Ginny had heard that the Boy Who Lived was coming to stay during the holidays she had been ecstatic. She had been hearing all about him ever since she was a small child. However, after two hours of listening to him and Ron go on and on and on about their exciting adventures on the third floor, she would have happily thrown herself into Fluffy's lair, just so that she wouldn't have to hear their story again. Percy had tried to warn her beforehand; he'd said that Jamie was an arrogant idiot. Ginny had had to agree with Percy's description after meeting the boy. Thankfully Jamie had been as uninterested in her as she was in him and she was soon left alone to her own devices. She had used extra precautions to make sure that they had come into as little contact with her during his stay as possible. Happily, he had eventually gone home with the added bonus of his taking Ron with him.

Percy ensured that Ginny was seated comfortably in a carriage, and then left to head off to the prefects' carriage. His mother had been delighted when he had been made a prefect the previous year. To congratulate him, she had bought him a beautiful owl allowing him to avoid using the decrepit family owl, Errol; who they now used out of nostalgia more than anything else. His owl, Hermes, had already gone ahead to school; the motion of the train tended to upset her.

Ginny smiled as the door to the compartment she was seated in opened and two girls looked in. "Are you a first year?" the smallest one asked.

"Yes. I'm Ginevra Prewett." Ginny politely held out her hand.

The taller girl turned to her friend. "This carriage will do just fine." She then turned and shook Ginny's hand. "I'm Theresa Davis, and this is Valerie Baddock."

The girls fully entered the carriage, and Valerie pulled the door to just as a tall blue-eyed woman swept by.

Anna had watched from the platform as family after family had arrived to help their children embark on their journey back to school. Her enhanced hearing had helped her to pick up on conversations that most people had thought were private; she smiled as she listened to the Boy Who Lived boasting to his friend. Luckily Dumbledore had banned any reporters from entering the platform unless they had family, so Jamie had been spared any serious interference on his way to board the Express. Anna decided she had seen enough on the platform and started to make her way onto the train, boarding at the far end and working her way up to the teachers' carriage.

Anna had smiled as the children she passed had looked at her in curiosity. She had deliberately cast a spell on her eyes to change their color; it wouldn't do to cause a panic if anyone wrongly deduced she was a werewolf after seeing her eyes' natural hue. Finally reaching the teachers' carriage, she opened the door, sat down and drew out her notebook. She tended to make notes of what she had seen and heard so that she could go over her observations at a later date without loss of detail. The sound of rapidly approaching footsteps alerted her to the fact that someone was coming up the corridor, and judging by the heaviness of the footsteps, she determined that this was a teacher, and not a student. She swiftly closed the book, and dropped the glamour masking her eyes. A tall dark-haired man stepped into the carriage just as Anna looked up.

Severus entered the carriage set aside for the teachers. Dumbledore had informed him that the new Muggle Studies teacher would also be taking the train. As he entered, the woman looked up. Severus felt his breath catch; her eyes were the amber of the werewolf; he recoiled involuntary but forced himself to hold out his hand.

"Severus Snape, potions."

“Anna Jameson, muggle studies.” Anna shook his hand briefly and let go. “I’m sorry but I couldn’t help notice your reaction to me when you stepped into the carriage. I’m not a werewolf if that helps at all.”

Obviously it did, for Severus relaxed visibly, but he still seemed a little unsure of her.

“Please sit down and I’ll explain.” Anna motioned across to the seat from her, which Severus sank into. “My great-grandfather was a werewolf. I’ve inherited a few of his abilities and the eye coloring of the werewolf. Unlike a werewolf, however, my eyes don’t lighten and darken according to the lunar cycle; they are always this color.”

“Thank you for telling me.” Severus still felt a little uneasy as he wondered what other abilities she possessed. “I hope that you don’t think me too forward but I am interested in whether you have the ability to become a werewolf.”

Anna smiled and shook her head. “No, I don’t but my animagus form is a wolf.”

“Most people don’t like to discuss their animagus forms.” Severus was intrigued despite his earlier misgivings. He wondered if she would be able to help him in his experiments with the Wolfsbane potion.

“I don’t believe in hiding things when I don’t need to. Although I’m being open and honest, I certainly don’t expect people to reciprocate in the same manner. In fact, I’d be surprised if they did.” Anna knew that Severus would be unlikely to open up to her.

Severus changed the subject. He certainly wasn’t going to spill all his secrets and divulge his personal fears to a woman he’d only just met. “Would you like a briefing on our most illustrious students?”

Anna nodded, recognizing Severus’ action for what it was. “Please. Why don’t you start with your own house?”

The two settled down as Severus gave Anna his unvarnished opinion of the students he had under his aegis, and those in the other houses.

As Severus had been entering the teacher's carriage, Harry was popping his head into an almost empty carriage. A small girl with fair hair was sat in the seat by the window reading her book. "Do you mind if we share the carriage with you?"

"Please." After looking up, the girl motioned for them to come into the carriage. She then went back to reading her book.

Harry, Hermione, and Neville all piled in. Dudley had gone next door to sit with Padma and Su Li. The rest of the Outcasts were spread throughout the train; Daphne was sitting with Tracey Davies; and Seamus and Dean had gone to sit with the Weasley twins and their friend from Gryffindor, Lee Jordan.

The girl stopped reading, and watched in interest as the three children made themselves comfortable. "Hi, I'm Luna Lovegood."

Hermione took it upon herself to introduce everyone. "I'm Hermione Snape, and this is Harry Lupin and Neville Longbottom."

"Are you all in the same house?" The girl enquired, placing her book down on the seat beside her.

Hermione glanced at the title, 'Bewildered Wizards and the Path to Enlightenment by Misty Fayed', as she replied. "No, I'm in Slytherin, Nev's a Gryffindor and Harry's in Ravenclaw."

The girl looked a little surprised. "I don't know why but I expected you to say that you were all in Gryffindor." She shook her head and went back to her reading.

Hermione thought the girl a little ditzy, especially given the fact that they were all wearing their school ties. She returned her attention to her friends. "Harry, you said you had some interesting news to share with us."

"We're moving house." Harry looked really excited.

"Where to?" Neville asked.

"A cottage just outside of Hogsmeade." Harry announced elatedly.

"I live there." Luna interjected into the conversation.

Hermione ignored Luna's comment and questioned Harry about his announcement. "Why? I thought you said your mother didn't want to have anything to do with the wizarding world except for your schooling."

"Dad's gone back to his old teaching job, he said it pays better, and two of my sisters are starting school next year. Mom wanted to be closer to all of us. At least I'll know one of my neighbors." Harry grinned at Luna. "Where do you live in Hogsmeade?"

"About five minutes away from Madam Puddifoot's." Luna decided she rather liked Harry.

"We're not far from there either. We've just bought Darcy Cottage." Harry wondered if Luna knew where it was.

"I live next door, in Fable House." Luna was delighted; the old neighbors had been a couple in their eighties without any family.

"I thought an old man lived there?" Harry quizzed Luna, as his two friends listened to the conversation with interest.

"Well, I wouldn't call Uncle Grimstock old, he's only 45." Luna sounded a little indignant.

Harry quickly scrambled to make amends. "Sorry, it's just what I've been told."

Luna smiled mischievously at him. "It's okay. Do you have brothers or sisters?" Now that she knew she would have Harry as a neighbor she was interested in learning all about his family.

"Yes, Dudley is in the carriage next door; he's in Ravenclaw as well. I have twin sisters who are starting Hogwarts next year, Aurilia and

Georgiana, and I have a little sister, Scarlett-Rose.” Harry listed his siblings, counting them off on his fingers, as he did so.

“It must be wonderful to have a brother and all those sisters. I’ve never had any brothers or sisters to play with.” Luna sounded a little regretful.

“So do you live with just your Uncle?” Hermione wondered what had happened to the girl’s parents and if they were still alive.

Luna’s expression now became sad. “Yes. My parents are both dead. I don’t really remember them very well. Daddy tried to save Mummy when an experiment she was doing went wrong. They were both killed in the explosion. I’ve lived with Uncle Grimstock since I was six.”

Harry tried to cheer her up. “I don’t remember my parents either. I don’t really know who my parents were but I think that my mother was my Mum’s sister.”

“What do you mean?” Luna looked confused.

“My parents have never really told me who my birth parents were; just that I was loved. During the holidays I found a picture of my mom and her sister. My eyes are exactly the same green color as her sister’s, and she looked really familiar.” Harry explained.

Hermione thought about Harry’s hypothesis for a moment. “That doesn’t mean that you were your Mum’s nephew. Your Mum might have picked you for adoption because you had green eyes like her sister. The familiarity can be explained by family likeness. Did the woman in the picture look like anyone else in your family?”

Harry’s face fell. “I never thought of that. Come to think of it she did look a little like Scarlett-Rose.”

Wanting to cheer Harry up, Hermione thought quickly. “You still might be right. If you are your Mum’s sister’s child, perhaps you can find out what happened by looking up her history.”

"I don't know her name."

Hermione was puzzled. "Then how did you know it was her sister?"

"The picture was in a frame at the bottom of a box in the back of the attic. The frame was made up of the word "Sisters", so I just assumed it was Mum and her sister." Harry responded. "Anyway, you're probably right; Mum never talks about her family; she always says it's too painful. Perhaps her sister died and she adopted me because my eyes reminded Mum of her."

Luna now looked even sadder. "I'm sorry."

Harry shook his head. "It's fine. I have parents who love me, my brother, and three sisters who all love me but live to annoy me."

Smiling at Harry's rueful look, Luna laughed. "They sound like fun."

Hermione looked at Neville and excused herself. Neville followed. "I think I upset both of them. I didn't mean to; I was just curious." Hermione looked a little uncomfortable.

"Don't worry about it. If Luna has been living with her Uncle since she was six, then she's probably used to people asking where her parents are, and Harry has just said that he is happy." Neville tried to reassure Hermione.

Laughter sounded from the carriage they had just left. "I think we can go back in now." Neville gently pushed Hermione back into the carriage.

Harry and Luna were looking at Luna's book together. "Hey guys. This is a great book. Luna was saying that her Uncle is really brilliant but a little absent-minded, so she is trying to find ways to help him out."

"How about a remembrall?", offered Neville, remembering the one his Gran had given to him.

“He’s lost about six already.” Luna giggled. “I sometimes feel like the grown-up in our house. I have to tell him when its time for dinner; he starts writing and forgets what he is doing.”

Forgetting about her faux pas earlier, Hermione eagerly asked what Luna’s Uncle did for a living.

“Oh, he’s a spell crafter and holds the highest level in potions mastery.” Luna looked proud as she spoke about her uncle.

“You’re uncle wouldn’t be Grimstock Glendower, would he?” Hermione asked hopefully.

Luna nodded. “Yes, do you know him?”

“Know him? I’ve read all his books!” It was now Hermione’s turn to bounce around in excitement. “I didn’t know he lived in Hogsmeade.”

“We’ve lived there for ages. He normally uses his real name of Grimstock Lovegood when we are in the village.” Luna explained.

“How come?” Harry thought it strange to use a different name.

“He thought he wouldn’t be taken seriously if he used the name Lovegood, so he uses his mother’s surname when he’s doing his research.” Luna explained.

“What’s wrong with the name Lovegood?” Harry wanted to know.

“Have you heard of the Quibbler?” Luna asked the three children.

Hermione had heard of it. “You mean that trashy magazine that prints those stories about weird creatures that no-one has ever heard of?”

“Yes, that one. My Dad used to run it before he died. When I am old enough, the running of the magazine will fall to me. Until then, my Uncle has appointed people to run it for me.” Luna knew that she was making Hermione feel a little ill at ease, but she was beginning to feel a little annoyed at the girl’s insensitive remarks.

Her face red with embarrassment, Hermione apologized. "I'm sorry, I didn't know it belonged to you."

Relenting a little, Luna waved off Hermione's apologies. "Forget about it. I don't have any say as to what the magazine prints. You can understand why my Uncle didn't want to be linked to the Lovegood name."

Hermione nodded. "Sorry again, and yes I can. He wouldn't have been taken very seriously as a scholar."

Luna yawned. She was quite tired. Even though she had lived close to the school she had still wanted to ride the train with the other students. It had meant getting up earlier; not only so that she could remind her Uncle that she was going but also to make sure that everything was packed for her journey. Their house elf was getting a little old and didn't always remember everything; a bit like her Uncle.

"I'm going to sleep now." With that, Luna stretched out on the seat, put her head on Harry's lap, and within a few moments had drifted off into a deep sleep.

Neville hadn't said much during the entire thing. He had actually felt a little intimidated by the small girl, and he was now glad she had settled down to get some sleep. "I think I'm going to follow Luna's example and get a little sleep myself."

Harry leant back against the seat and closed his eyes. Hermione didn't want to sleep so she rummaged around in her bag for her book on history. The journey continued unbroken until they received a visit from the Weasley twins and their friend Lee. The twins and Lee had been friends before they started at Hogwarts and they'd all agreed that no house division was going to change that. They had dropped by to fill everyone in on the next DADA teacher. Luna continued to sleep throughout the entire conversation, including Harry's explanation as to who she was.

After exchanging greetings, Fred couldn't hold himself back any longer. "You won't believe who the next DADA teacher is. Go on, guess." Fred chuckled merrily to himself.

Hermione knew, so she remained silent.

After a few futile guesses, Harry gave in. "I don't know, who?"

"Gilderoy Lockhart." Fred looked at Harry waiting for him to burst out laughing.

"You mean the author of the bloody awful books we had to buy?" Harry sounded disdainful.

"Yep, the one and only. You should have seen Aunt Andy at Flourish & Blotts. Lockhart was there for a book signing; she couldn't stop fluttering her eyelashes." George fell about laughing as his brother did an over-exaggerated impression of his stepmother.

"What's the big deal?" Harry asked.

"He's supposed to have done all these brave and wonderful deeds. The women love him. You couldn't move in Flourish & Blotts for women simpering at Lockhart. He dresses like a right one too!" George had been really annoyed; his girlfriend, Angie, had almost swooned in delight when Lockhart had touched her hand.

"I just hope he's better than his books." Hermione chimed in.

"What, you mean you aren't going to fall at his feet like all the others?" George wanted to know.

Hermione determinedly shook her head. "Have you read those books? There are so many wrong facts in his stories I'm surprised he ever got printed."

Hermione refused to admit to herself that she had been a little awed when she had discovered that Lockhart was coming to teach at Hogwarts. That was until her mother had pointed out some inconsistencies in Lockhart's stories. Hermione's adolescent fantasies had vanished like a puff of smoke once she had sat and read through the books herself.

“Dad said that Lucius Malfoy is a major backer of Lockhart’s books; its how Lockhart managed to get into print in the first place. Malfoy and his family were there as well.” Fred explained.

“Lucius Malfoy was there? Even as Lockhart’s backer, I would have thought a book signing was beneath him?” Harry queried.

“Apparently he was on his way to lunch with the Minister. He couldn’t wait to tell our Dad that.” Fred pulled a disgusted face. “Dad got into a fight with him. He insulted Aunt Andy and her sister, who was also there buying Draco’s books for school.”

“Who won?” Neville didn’t like the Malfoys and hoped that Fred would say his Dad.

“No-one, it was broken up before anyone got really hurt. Dad did give him a black eye though.” Fred smiled dreamily at the memory.

“What about your Dad?” Harry wondered how Mr. Weasley had faired against the other man.

George filled Harry in. “Malfoy broke his nose. Aunt Andy was furious.”

The warning for the approach to the school sounded and the three boys disappeared back to their carriage to get changed into their robes.

Harry gently woke Luna up. “Luna, it’s time to wake up. You need to pull your robes on before we arrive.”

Luna stretched and got up off Harry’s lap. She decided that it had been a good start to the school year.

The first years walked into the Great Hall; most of them were staring at the ceiling. There in front of them was a stool and atop of it sat a raggedy looking hat. Everyone watched as a rip in the hat opened up and it began to sing.

“I’m going to make this short but true

What makes me pick the House for you?

To Hufflepuff go those who trust

For Ravenclaws knowledge is a must

To Slytherin go the shrewd and wily

In Gryffindor valor is deemed most highly

But in whichever House you go

There is one thing that you should know

Friends can come from the Houses four

And now this year I'll say no more."

It had been the hat's shortest ever song, but no-one was complaining. Professor McGonagall unrolled the class list and began with 'Arthur, David' who went to Hufflepuff; Baddock, Valerie to Slytherin; Bailey, Miranda went to Gryffindor, Creevey, Colin to Gryffindor, and she kept going until she finally got to Lovegood, Luna.

Luna had entered the hall and hadn't bothered to look up at the ceiling. She was too busy looking for, and once she had found him, waving at Harry, who waved back at her. She approached the front of the room with all of the other first years and waited patiently for her name to be called. When her name was called, she stepped eagerly up to the stool and placed the hat on her head.

"Well, I never." The hat declared.

Luna was a little startled at the hat's intrusion into her mind. "Well, you never what?"

"I've never seen a mind quite like yours before. It's a form of ordered chaos. This is going to make picking a house for you a little tougher than usual." The hat hummed to itself while it thought about it. "I could

put you in Hufflepuff; your loyalty is your foremost quality. However, I don't think you would thrive in that House. Slytherin would eat you alive, even though you possess some ambition but it is for others and not for yourself. How about Gryffindor?" The hat asked Luna.

"You're asking me? I thought you made the choice." Luna was surprised.

"Occasionally, when I can't make up my mind, I do like a second opinion." The hat sounded a little put out.

"Well, in that case I definitely don't want Gryffindor. My Uncle Grimstock said that they are all a bunch of idiots who rush into things without using their brains." Luna was fervent in her refusal of Gryffindor.

"Sadly that can be true of some. As we've eliminated three of the four that only leaves RAVENCLAW." The hat made its voice audible to the entire hall on the last word.

Luna politely thanked it, took the hat off and carefully placed it on the stool. She then ran up to Harry and squeezed in beside him.

The sorting continued until it finally reached Ginny. She felt a little nervous as she stepped up to the stool and placed the hat on her head. Her two friends had both made Slytherin, and as much as her mother had said she hoped that Ginny made Gryffindor, Ginny knew that she didn't want to be in the same house as the Boy Who Bored.

"Miss Prewett, a nice tidy mind here. There's not much here for me to do. Off to SLYTHERIN with you." The hat yelled out the word 'Slytherin' for the entire audience to hear.

Ginny pulled the hat off her head and threw it onto the stool. She then marched happily towards the Slytherin table where her brother and friends were clapping loudly.

Over on the Gryffindor table, Ron scowled at Jamie. "Can you believe she went into Slytherin?"

Jamie was surprised at Ron's comment. "Not really, I would have been more surprised if she hadn't."

"So you're saying my sister is a slimy Slytherin." Ron's ears started to turn pink.

"No. I'm saying that she is a little sneaky; look at how she tried to get away from us during the holiday. She didn't having any problem telling your Mum about what we were up to. If that isn't sneaky, then I don't know what is." Jamie had thought he would really like Ron's sister when he first went to stay with Ron, but he hadn't. He had decided that she was a nasty little girl who thought only of herself.

Ron calmed down. His friend was right. Ginny had used every trick she knew to make sure that the two boys didn't get to spend any time with her. It was almost as if Ginny hadn't liked his friend. Ron shook his head at that thought. "Sorry mate."

Any further conversation was put on hold as Dumbledore stood up to introduce two new teachers. "I would like to introduce our new Muggle Studies teacher, Professor Jameson."

Polite clapping was heard throughout the hall as the professor stood up and then sat back down.

"And our new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Professor Lockhart." The girls in the hall went wild with applause as Lockhart stood up and took a bow.

On the Ravenclaw table George just shook his head in disgust, and he noticed that most of the boys on his table did the same. He also noticed that Luna had just clapped politely.

"Hey, Luna. Don't you like Lockhart?" George was surprised that there might actually be two girls in the school who didn't want to fawn all over the teacher. He had been surprised to find one.

"My Uncle said he is a fraud." Luna said simply.

"I already like your Uncle and I've never even met him!" George beamed at Luna.

By now Dumbledore had made his usual speech and the food had appeared on the tables. Silence fell over the hall for a few moments while people savored their first bites of the delicious offerings. That didn't last long though. Soon chatter filled the room as people got to know their new housemates.

The feast over, everyone left the hall and made their way to their new Houses, ostensibly to sleep; though for some of the older children, that wouldn't be the case, as they stayed up late renewing their friendships. However, eventually the entire school fell still as its inhabitants drifted off to sleep.

Draco's first day had gone well. The potions lesson had been extremely interesting as Professor Snape had now begun to introduce the class to slightly more exotic potions ingredients. Draco decided that he would use the diary he had found to keep a list of the various potions ingredients that they were now covering.

Draco found himself a quiet spot in the library as far away from the Outcasts as he could. Pansy was studying with the Outcasts but no matter how hard she had tried to persuade him, he had refused to join her. Draco pulled out the diary he had found and opened his potions text book. He then took out his favorite quill, dipped it in ink and began to write in the diary.

'Belladonna has many properties including...' Draco looked away from the diary to check his notations before he continued. He glanced back to his freshly written sentence, only to watch as the words sank into the page. Deciding that there must be something wrong with the ink, he changed to a different color and dipped his quill in again before starting to write once more.

'Belladonna has...' Draco didn't get any further before the writing once more disappeared. Suddenly writing pushed its way onto the page.

'Hello'

Draco wasn't quite sure whether he should respond or not. 'What are you?'

'My name is Tom.'

'Tom?'

'Yes. This was my diary.'

'But there's nothing in it.'

Several minutes passed and no more words appeared in the diary. Feeling a little alarmed, Draco slammed the diary shut and pushed it under the pile of books he had with him. He then took out a plain piece of parchment and carried on with his work until he was satisfied. However, throughout the evening he continued to glance at the pile of books that he had shoved the diary under.

The morning dawned bright and sunny as Harry and Dudley made their way to the Defense classroom.

"I hope his lessons will be more interesting than his books." Harry wasn't looking forward to lesson at all.

"How bad can he be?" Dudley, who hadn't read the books, thought that Harry was probably exaggerating. Sadly it turned out that Harry hadn't been.

Lockhart swept into the classroom; an eyesore in bright lilac. "Good morning children, good morning. As you probably all know I am Professor Lockhart. The first thing we are going to do is to have a test. I just know that you will all have read my books; more than once if I'm not mistaken."

Lockhart flashed his pearly white teeth at the class. All of the girls fluttered their eyelashes while the boys wore varying expressions of disgust and dislike. Lockhart then whizzed around the classroom handing out the quiz.

Harry picked it up, and just as quickly put it back down. The questions all related to Lockhart himself.

“What is my favorite color?” “What is my secret ambition?” “What is my ideal birthday gift?”

Harry turned to Dudley, who was looking dumbfounded. “I’m not answering this rubbish.”

“Is there something the matter, Mr Lupin?” Lockhart beamed at the boy.

“Yes, sir. This quiz has nothing to do with Defense.” Harry pointed out.

“Now, now, I suggest you pick up your quill and start. I think it important to know all about your teacher.” Lockhart tossed his head on the last word; the girls all sighed.

“I’m sorry sir, but I’m not doing this.” Harry absolutely refused; it was a complete waste of his time.

Terry Boot and Anthony Goldstein decided that they were going to follow Harry’s lead and put down their quills. Draco watched Harry quietly; he knew he wouldn’t have dared to talk to a teacher like that.

Dudley decided to back up his brother. “I’m not doing it either.” Dudley didn’t know any of the answers anyway as he hadn’t even bothered to open up a book.

The Hufflepuffs all continued to write; they didn’t like trouble and this was trouble with a capital T.

“Mr Lupin, you and your brother will please leave the classroom and stand outside. Anyone else who feels the same way may also leave.” Lockhart ordered the boys out.

Harry and Dudley packed up their things and left the classroom. Terry, Anthony and Draco soon followed. However, they were the only ones.

After the class had ended all five boys were called back inside.

“You will all report to me on Sunday night for detention.” Lockhart had already decided on their punishment; they would be helping him answer his fan mail. He knew that they would just love it.

6th September 1992

“Ron, I’m going down to the quidditch pitch. Do you want to come?” Jamie asked his friend who was busy playing chess with Lavender Brown.

“Nah, I’ve promised to play Parvati after I finish with Lavender.” Ron barely spared his friend a glance; his interest fully on the game. Lavender was turning out to be a surprisingly tough opponent.

“See you later then.” Jamie headed out of the door; Ron never bothered responding.

When he arrived at the quidditch pitch, Jamie found a practice game in session. He hadn’t expected anyone to be playing this late in the day and he’d wanted to walk over the pitch once more to get a feel for it before the try-outs on Saturday morning.

“Come to spy on the Ravenclaws?” Jamie’s observations were disturbed by a girl with reddish-blond hair who was sitting on the bleachers watching the practice.

Jamie shook his head, and sat down. “Nope. I was just coming down to get a look at the pitch before try-outs on Saturday.” Jamie held out his hand and smiled at the girl. “I’m Jamie Potter.”

The girl returned the smile and shook Jamie’s hand. “Hi, I’m Marietta Edgecombe. My friend Cho is the seeker for Ravenclaw.”

Jamie looked up at the fliers. He spotted the tiny oriental girl whizzing around the pitch at speed. “She looks pretty good on a broom.”

Marietta nodded. “She’s great but…”

Marietta's words came to an abrupt halt as Cho attempted a Wronski Feint and didn't quite pull up in time. She ploughed heavily into the ground.

Jamie leapt up and ran to the girl's side. "Are you hurt?"

Cho looked up. "I don't think so. Just a little winded."

By now Cho's teammates and Marietta had also reached Cho's side.

"Are you okay?" Roger Davies glanced down with a concerned look at the fallen girl.

"I'm fine. Just get back to the practice. It'll be too dark soon otherwise." Cho waved off his concerns and tried to stand up only for her knee to collapse from under her, sending her crashing towards the ground.

Jamie reached out and caught the girl before she could do any further damage to her leg. "I'll take you to the hospital wing."

"Thanks. Marietta, do you want come along as well?" Cho asked her friend.

"Do you mind if I stay?" The girl said, blushing.

"Of course I don't. I'm sure Mr. Potter will be able to help me up to the hospital wing on his own." Cho, who knew her friend hadn't really come down to watch her, looked at Jamie, who nodded affirmatively.

"Then that's settled."

Jamie moved so that he was supporting Cho on her injured side, and together they slowly made their way back to Hogwarts.

"My name's not Mr. Potter, its Jamie."

"In that case you can call me Cho. I'm pleased to meet you."

"Likewise."

"I'm thinking of trying out for seeker for Gryffindor." Jamie blurted out.

Cho felt a little disappointed. "So you were just here to spy on us then?"

"No, I was just checking out the pitch until I started talking to your friend. She seems to be your number one fan."

"She wasn't really there to see me. She has a huge crush on the team captain, Roger Davies. Please don't tell her I told you though." Cho pleaded, flashing a small smile in Jamie's direction.

Jamie felt his heart lurch a little at the pretty girl's smile. "I won't, don't worry."

The two then fell silent until they reached the hospital wing.

Jamie pushed open the door. "I guess you're all safe and sound now." He felt reluctant to leave the girl.

"Thank you. Perhaps we could get together some time to talk quidditch." Cho blushed; she didn't know why but she decided that she really quite liked Jamie even though they had only just met.

Jamie's face lit up as he enthusiastically nodded at her suggestion. "That would be great. How about in the library after the quidditch try-outs?"

Madam Pomfrey came bustling in at that moment. "Miss Chang, here again I see. Mr. Potter, you may go."

Cho didn't have a chance to respond to Jamie as the efficient matron hustled her away across the room.

Jamie left, wondering if Cho would turn up or not.

The next night

The five Ravenclaws all headed out of their dormitory and headed towards the Defense classroom. Lockhart was waiting for them. He wasn't alone, Hermione and Luna were already seated at desks and had a pile of papers in front of them.

"Please each take out your quill and pick up a pile. I want to you each to respond to my loyal fans. Leave the signature blank. I will fill that in."

Grumbling the boys each took a pile. Harry had been about to say something but Draco just shook his head. Surprised that Draco had even acknowledged him, Harry dutifully took up his quill and started to complete the allocated task. Three hours later all the children were released.

Harry and Dudley talked quietly together. Luna and Hermione were a short distance behind them. All of a sudden Harry heard a voice whispering, "Kill, maim, tear, feast".

Harry stopped suddenly. "Dudley, did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Dudley listened carefully.

"I thought I heard something, but it could have just been the timbers creaking." Hermione told Harry. Luna just shook her head to say that she hadn't heard anything.

The other three boys all stopped as well. They also hadn't heard anything. Everyone stood still and listened but after a few minutes nobody had heard anything else.

"It's nothing; sorry I've held everyone up." Harry yawned. "Let's get back Hermione back to Slytherin and we can then head up to bed."

Draco, Anthony and Terry all headed off for Ravenclaw Tower while Harry, Dudley and Luna escorted Hermione to the dungeons. After leaving Hermione safely at a blank wall, the remaining Ravenclaws retraced their steps and headed for the Tower. They were all tired and had lessons in the morning.

12th September 1992

Jamie strolled down to the pitch feeling quite confident in his own abilities. The previous year's seeker, Amanda Kelly, had been pretty awful and Gryffindor had failed to win a single match. Oliver Wood, their captain had been completely despondent.

"So, what do you think your chances are of making the team?" Ron asked his friend for the tenth time.

"As I've already said, I've spoken to Oliver and there are only two contenders for the position of seeker; myself and Amanda Kelly. I know that I'm better than her so I think that my chances are pretty good."

The two boys arrived at the pitch which was like a madhouse. The hopefuls zipping around from the field came from not only Gryffindor, but also from the other three houses. It had been decided that all houses would try out together to add to the realism of the tests.

Madam Hooch had been appointed to oversee the try-outs, and she now stood with the four team captains. She looked down at her watch, and then blew sharply on her whistle. "Everyone who is here to try out for a team position, please come stand by me; everyone else take a seat or leave."

A few minutes later the hopefuls were all standing in front of Madam Hooch awaiting her orders.

"Can anyone is trying out for the keeper position please step forward."

No-one except for last year's position holders stepped forward. Madam Hooch looked to the captains who all nodded except for Oliver Wood.

"Wood, I agree you should retain your position." Hooch told him. Even though he was captain, Oliver was not permitted to confirm his own place in the team unless agreed by Hooch.

Madam Hooch turned back to her clipboard. "Chasers and beaters, please step forward."

So many people stepped forward that Hooch was forced to split them into six teams. "Can I also have the keepers up here? Wood, you'll need to get someone to play in your position for this exercise."

Wood was a little lost as to who put in his place until one of the fifth years who had been spectating offered to step in.

Hooch continued with her speech. "This will be played as a normal game for ten minutes. We will be watching to see who performs the best. Due to the high numbers trying out, our decision will be posted on the notice board tomorrow morning. Now teams one and two, off you go."

Jamie watched with Ron as the first two teams took off; these teams were mostly made up of second years, none of whom were really very good. As these teams landed, Jamie noticed Dudley Lupin mounting a broom with a bat in his hand. He snorted and had been about to make a derogatory comment about beaters when he suddenly remembered that both of Ron's brothers were beaters. Much to Jamie's chagrin, Dudley had been one of the better players. The final groups took to the air and Jamie was now starting to feel excited. He said goodbye to Ron and got up to head back down to the pitch.

The last team landed and Hooch made a final notation on her clipboard. She spoke first to the captains. "I agree that all three of you should retain your current positions. Seekers, to me please."

Jamie counted, there were fifteen potential seekers standing there, but only two were from his own house.

"I shall release ten snitches. To make it through to the next round, you need to catch one and then bring it back to me here." Hooch reached down and picked out ten snitches from a bag she had with her.

Jamie mounted his broom and took off. Hooch released the snitches and the sky was suddenly filled with fliers desperately looking for their ticket through to the next round. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Cho and Lupin heading off in the same direction. Suddenly a snitch appeared in front of his face; Jamie reached out and grabbed it. He flew quickly back down to where Hooch and Wood were standing.

“Well done Potter, you’re the first one back.” Hooch praised the boy; Wood looked happy.

One by one the ten spots soon filled up. Jamie watched as Lupin landed in the middle of the pack; the last player back with a snitch had been Cho. Annoyingly Kelly had also managed to catch a snitch, although not as quickly as he had.

Hooch was speaking once again. “I will once again release ten snitches. This time you have fifteen minutes to catch as many as you can. All those without any are eliminated.

Jamie was anxious to do well. He knew he only had to get one snitch and he was through to the next round. The snitches were released and the players were off. Fifteen minutes later Jamie landed with two snitches safely secured in his pocket. Lupin and Cho had also both caught two. The remaining contestants each had one; Amanda from his own house, Higgs from Slytherin, and Summerby and Diggory who were both from Hufflepuff.

All the other contestants left the field. “For the final test I will release seven snitches. Try to catch as many as you can. If you each catch one, then it will be up to the team captains to decide who makes the position.”

Hooch released the seven snitches. Jamie flew quickly into the air and straight into the path of a snitch which he quickly grabbed. He soon had two snitches tucked into his pocket. He saw Cho grabbing a snitch and inwardly cheered the girl on. Five minutes Hooch blew her whistle.

“Please pass the snitches you have caught to me.” Hooch ordered.

Jamie handed over his two; Kelly had none. Cho had one but so did Lupin. Diggory had caught two and Higgs had one.

Before Madam Hooch could say anything, Roger Davies drew Cho and Harry over to one side. "You've both flown really well but seniority has to take precedence. Well done, Cho, the position is yours. As you both completed the tasks, I spoke with Madam Hooch and she felt that it was only fair that the position should go to you as the incumbent seeker.

Harry, we'd like you to be the reserve seeker. I'm sorry you didn't make the regular team but you should be proud that you flew so well. If it makes you feel any better, you can tell your brother that he has made the team." Davies patted Harry on the shoulder, and left him to make his way back to the school.

Jamie had watched as Davies had taken Harry and Cho aside. He knew that Cho had got the position as her face had lit up in delight when Davies was speaking to her. Wood was coming towards him now.

"Jamie, the position is yours. I've explained to Amanda that she will be reserve, and she is happy with that." Wood ambled off wearing a big smile; after Potter's performance, he knew that they had a good chance of walking away with the cup.

Dudley dashed up to Harry. "Did you get the position?"

Harry shook his head. "No, Davies felt that we both did well. Cho was already the seeker from last year and so the spot went to her. I'm the reserve."

Luna pulled Harry into a hug. "I'm sorry; I thought you were much better than she was."

Harry smiled down at the girl in his arms. "It was a fair decision but thanks. I think I need to go and get a shower; I'm a bit hot and sweaty."

Harry started to walk away but then he remembered what else Davies had said. "Oh by the way Dudley, you made the team. Congratulations."

Dudley grabbed Luna and swung her around. "I made the team."

"I know; I was listening too." Luna grinned at the boy, but most of her attention was on Harry as he walked back towards the school.

Jamie rushed through his shower and then dashed up to Gryffindor tower to get his books. He then made his way to the library and sat down. Deciding that he might as well get some of his homework done, he opened up his books and made a start. Two hours he had finished and Cho still hadn't shown up. Despondently Jamie packed up his things and headed towards the exit, only to be almost knocked off his feet by a running girl; it was Marietta.

"Cho sent you to do her dirty work, has she?" Jamie spat out bitterly.

"I'm sorry, Cho asked me to deliver a message to you but I was held up." Marietta looked apologetically at Jamie. She'd actually been celebrating with the other Ravenclaws over the newly selected quidditch team and had forgotten her promise to Cho.

"So, what's the message?" Jamie asked impatiently.

"Cho said she's sorry but she's in the hospital wing. She slipped in the showers and fractured the same knee she injured last week. Madam Pomfrey is keeping her in overnight to regrow her bones." Marietta explained.

"Can I go visit her?" Jamie asked.

Marietta shook her head. "Madam Pomfrey has said she needs her rest, so no visitors. Cho said that she will meet you here tomorrow night at seven. I've got to go."

Marietta rushed off before Jamie had a chance to say anything further. Grinning Jamie walked slowly back to Gryffindor tower; Cho did like him after all.

The next morning at breakfast Dumbledore had an announcement to make. "Last night there was incident close to Hagrid's hut. Something killed all the school roosters. The area around Hagrid's hut is therefore now out of bounds, until we have secured the area. Thank you."

Dumbledore sat down and looked around the Hall at the students. He had been quite sparing in his description of the roosters' deaths. They hadn't just been slaughtered; they'd been ripped to shreds by their killer.

At the Ravenclaw table, Draco yawned loudly. Even though he had gone to bed early, he didn't feel as if he had gotten much sleep. He'd been late coming down to breakfast. He'd had to stop to change his shoes; his usual pair had been covered in mud. Deciding that he must have forgotten to put them out for cleaning the last time he wore them, he'd just picked out another pair and continued down to breakfast.

This was now the second time he had forgotten about something. Only two days ago he had awoken to find dirt on his robes and his books and the diary lying on the floor beside his bed. He knew he'd fallen asleep reading but he couldn't remember getting the diary out of his trunk where he'd placed it after he'd seen the strange writing appear in it. He also couldn't remember anywhere he could have gotten dirt on his robe. Shaking his head, Draco yawned once more and started to eat his breakfast.

I have started chapter 17 (2,000 words) but may not be able to post it for a couple of weeks as I have plans for Memorial weekend. I will also be going away on a long weekend trip next week, camping. I therefore won't have any internet access. If I can get a chapter posted before I go, I will, otherwise don't expect one until the beginning of June. Thanks again to everyone who has taken the time to review or who has added this story to their alerts and C2s.

Chapter 17: Wins and Losses

My husband got called into work so we had to cancel our plans for the weekend, hence the new chapter. I've messed around with the canon timeline and quidditch match order in this chapter.

13th September 1992

Letters 1

Dear Dad/Mum

Hope you are okay.

Dudley made the Ravenclaw team as a beater! He was really good and I'm really happy for him.

I've just been made reserve seeker for Ravenclaw. I did as well as Cho, who was the seeker for Ravenclaw last year but she got the main seeker position because she was the current seeker. To be honest I only entered the competition for seeker because Dudley, Neville and Luna pushed me to. I'm a little worried about quidditch affecting my schoolwork as I've still got to go to practices every week, even though I am only the reserve.

Jamie Potter got the Gryffindor position. Dudley told me he was really lucky with his snitches. In the first round he flew into one. Dudley said it was almost as if the snitches were placed in front of him. That's enough about talk about quidditch. Mum, I know you don't really understand why everyone gets so excited about it.

I met one of our new neighbors on the train, Luna Lovegood. She is really nice and reminds me a little of Aurilia. Hopefully you'll get to meet her at Christmas.

I'm going to go now. Hedwig is hooting impatiently at me. She wants to spread her wings a little. Ouch! She just nibbled on my ear.

Love

Harry

P.S. Dudley said sorry but he'll write next week. He's behind with his potions homework.

Dear Harry

Congratulations on being reserve seeker. Congratulate your brother for me on making I'm not very good with quidditch. Your sisters and I are missing you. The new house is wonderful.

I've already met our new neighbor, Grimstock Lovegood, who, like his niece, is very nice. He's been round several times to fix a few things for me as I can't do magic. In return I've fixed him a few home-cooked meals. The girls think he is really funny. The first time he was here, he stopped eating and started writing, before realizing what he was doing. You will meet him at Christmas as I've invited the Lovegoods for Christmas dinner.

Give my love to Dudley. Tell him to keep working hard and that I'm looking forward to receiving his letter.

Love

Mum

Xxx

Dear Harry

I understand about your studies but congratulations anyway on making reserve. I hope that you get a chance to play on the team. If you get the chance, you need to put everything into it. The chance to play on the quidditch is a great honor; at least that's what my school friends used to tell me!

I'm not going to be back to Hogsmeade until Christmas as I've been given a six month contract. I have to teach everyday except for Sunday. It would be too much traveling back and forth for just a few hours. I've rented a flat in London, 22 Danvers Square. Hedwig

managed to find me just fine without the address though. She's hooting in my ear right now!

If there's anything you or Dudley need, let me know. Tell him well done on his position.

Love

Dad xxx

P.S. There's a little something on its way for you both.

19th September 1992

Hermione headed down to the dungeons to her father's apartment. He had sent her a note reminding her that he had arranged for the two of them to have a private birthday dinner in his quarters.

As Hermione opened the door, she was surprised to see not only her father but also her mother and siblings. "Mama, I didn't know you would be here."

Virginie passed Dominic to his father and went to hug her daughter. "Happy Birthday, Hermione. Did you think I'd miss your birthday?"

Hermione shook her head and went to hug Livvy and Seb. She then took Dominic off her father and placed him on her lap.

"Open our presents" Olivia was excited; she had missed her big sister.

"After dinner, and please settle down." Severus looked sternly at his youngest daughter, who just grinned happily at her father.

Hermione's parents had arranged for all of her favorite food to be served; goats' cheese tart, lamb in red wine and for dessert, chocolate mousse. This type of food was typical fare usually served in pureblood households. Hermione had found the food served at Hogwarts to be delicious but very monotonous and plain, so this special treat was especially welcome. It was a happy gathering who tucked into the meal that night.

Once the meal was over and everything had been cleared away, Hermione opened her presents. Her siblings had bought her some chew toys for Crookshanks, who had a bad habit of eating everything that wasn't tied down, a picture frame from Dominic with a picture of him in it asleep, and finally, some suitable Defense books from her parents to replace those she was supposed to be reading in Lockhart's class.

The clock chimed nine as Hermione finished thanking everyone. Virginie stood up.

"I'm sorry sweetheart, but we must go now. Dominic needs to be put to bed." Virginie hugged her daughter once more.

"I don't want to go." Olivia was tired and pouted at her mother.

Severus got up, picked up his daughter and took his son by the hand. "Now say goodbye to your sister."

Both children dejectedly said their goodbyes and the visitors flooded out of the castle, Dominic wrapped deep within his mother's robes.

"Thank you for the birthday surprise, Papa. It was wonderful." Hermione hugged her father.

"You are welcome, Hermione. Now please, sit down. We've something important to discuss." Severus was frowning.

Hermione wondered what was so important.

"As you know, today is your 13th birthday and on this day, you may be approached to enter into a formal betrothal." Severus started to tell Hermione.

"Do you mean to say that someone has made an offer?" Hermione was amazed. Generally the custom had died out except amongst the older wizarding families, although it had seen something of a revival after Voldemort's fall.

“Actually you’ve received two offers.” Severus wasn’t happy about Hermione receiving one offer, let alone two; he didn’t think anyone was good enough for his daughter.

“Who are they from, Papa?” Hermione was now curious as to who would want to tie themselves into marriage at such an early age.

“Theodore Nott and Neville Longbottom.” Severus pulled a face as he told his daughter. “Nott’s parents and Longbottom’s mother have made the necessary overtures to your mother and me. I just need to know whether you wish to reject the offers, accept them or to place them in abeyance.”

Hermione was astounded. She hardly knew Nott and she hadn’t considered that Neville may have thought of her that way. “Well, I can definitely say no to Nott. I don’t trust him and I certainly wouldn’t marry him.”

“What about Longbottom?” Severus was hoping she would refuse him as well.

“Can I place him on abeyance, Papa? I really like him as a friend but nothing more at the moment. I don’t know how I might feel in a few years’ time and I don’t want to make a mistake by saying no now.” Hermione knew that if she refused now, any future alliance between her and Neville would be impermissible.

Severus grumbled a little. “I can’t say I’m happy about Longbottom, but I will respect your wishes.”

“Papa, I’d like to tell them both in person as to my reasons why I won’t accept them. What do you think I should say?” Hermione really wanted her father’s input.

“Be honest, but be careful. The Notts are quite powerful people and I don’t want to upset them. Just explain to Nott that you don’t really know him, and follow his lead from there. Longbottom’s an idiot and will go along with whatever you say.” Severus was still a little peeved that his daughter had decided to put Longbottom’s proposal on hold;

he thought the boy was totally wrong for Hermione. "How long do you want the proposal put on hold for?"

Hermione thought for a moment. "Until Neville's 14th birthday, I think."

"You do know that you will be unable to accept any further proposals until then?" Severus wanted to make sure Hermione knew what she was doing.

"I don't really want to get married for some time, and at least this way, no-one can bother me with marriage proposals."

"That makes sense. Take my private entry into the dungeons; it's past your curfew and I don't want Filch catching you wandering about. You know how he feels about this family." Severus cautioned Hermione.

Argus Filch blamed Severus' mother for a failed potion his own mother had taken when she was trying to conceive him. Lydia Filch had already given birth to two squibs and she had been willing to try anything to give birth to a magical baby. Eileen Snape had offered her an experimental potion which Lydia had been more than happy to try. It had partially worked; Filch's brother Andrew had been born magical but Argus had not. Ever since he had found out about the potion, Argus had reviled the entire Snape family. What made it harder for Filch was that his mother had taken the potion again and his younger siblings had been born magical. Now Argus refused to talk to his own family, only keeping in touch with his squib siblings, Helena and David.

Hermione hugged her father and left through the side door. Severus settled down to draft Hermione's wishes into responses for the two families.

The next afternoon Hermione went looking for Neville, who was sitting by the lake.

"Neville, can I have a word?" Hermione asked gently. She wasn't entirely sure if Mrs. Longbottom had spoken to her son yet.

Neville shot up from where he had been sitting and turned to her eagerly. "Have your parents received...?"

Neville's response was cut off by Hermione holding up her hand. "Yes, they have. That's why I'm here to talk to you. I wanted to tell you about my response in person."

Neville felt his heart sink; she must have said no. "But..."

Hermione felt nervous. "Neville please let me speak."

He fell silent.

"Thank you for your proposal. I am honored that you think highly enough of me to issue one. I haven't accepted your offer..." Hermione watched the boy's face fall as she hesitated in her speech. "But I haven't refused it either. I've asked for it to be placed on hold until your 14th birthday."

"Why?" Neville asked cautiously; he wasn't entirely sure he was going to be happy with the answer.

"Because before I accept anyone's proposal, I want to make sure that I love and care about that person enough to say yes. Right now I only see you as a good friend, but nothing more. I'm sorry, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I don't want to lie either. Can you understand?" Hermione hoped she hadn't ruined their friendship.

Neville nodded in response to Hermione's question. He was feeling a little despondent after her speech, but at least she hadn't refused him outright. He wondered what his mother would do. He decided that it would be best if he wrote to her.

He wondered if anyone else had made an offer. "Did anyone else offer for you?"

Hermione blushed a little. "Yes, they did."

"Do you mind if I ask who?" Neville wondered if it was Harry, despite Harry's reassurances that he only saw Hermione as his friend.

“Nott.”

“Theodore Nott, the Slytherin?” Neville was astounded.

“Yes. I’ve refused his proposal, and I’ve already told him of my decision and my reasons behind it.” Hermione informed Neville.

“How did he take it?” Neville’s curiosity got the better of him

“Theo was very polite. It was his parents’ idea and not his, so he was somewhat relieved at my refusal.”

“Theo?” Neville questioned Hermione’s use of Nott’s first name.

“Look, it’s nearly dinner time. Shall we head back to the castle and I’ll tell you all about my discussion with Theo?” Hermione asked.

“Let’s go then.” Neville wanted to get back for dinner but he also wanted to write to his mother; he didn’t want her to withdraw the offer or refuse the abeyance.

The two children turned and headed towards the castle; Neville contemplating his letter, and Hermione reciting her discussion with Nott.

Earlier that day

Hermione cornered Nott in a corner of the Slytherin common room.
“Nott, can you spare a few minutes?”

The skinny, dark-haired boy looked up, wondering what Snape could want with him. “Sure. What’s it about?”

“It’s private. Do you want to come with me to my room?” Hermione felt a little nervous at the thought of being alone in her room with this boy, but she knew that she couldn’t embarrass him in public.

Nott’s only response was to raise his eyebrow quizzically and get up to follow Hermione into her room.

“Please, take a seat.” Hermione indicated the silver upholstered chair that was tucked under her study desk.

Nott sat down. “What is so private that it needs to be discussed in your room, Snape?”

“Did you know that it was my birthday yesterday?” Hermione started off.

Nott wondered why he would care. Then he figured it out, and went white. “Oh, Merlin. My parents sent you a proposal didn’t they?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, they did. I wanted to tell you personally that I have refused the proposal, and I didn’t want to do it in front of an audience.”

The boy in front of her let out a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness. For one moment I thought you were going to say you had accepted.” A thought occurred to him. “Why did you bother telling me at all? My parents would probably have told me eventually.”

“It seemed the polite thing to do in case your parents hadn’t told you about my refusal. I didn’t want you learning about it from the Daily Prophet.” Hermione explained.

The Daily Prophet printed a list every Friday which included deaths, marriages, betrothals and offers. Friday’s paper was usually their best seller as everyone liked a malicious bit of gossip.

“Thank you. Sorry, I didn’t mean to offend you, but I’m just not ready to get married to anyone yet, it’s not just you.” Nott explained his palpable desire at not wanting to be betrothed to Hermione. “Did you get any other offers?”

“Yes; I received another one from Neville Longbottom, which I have held in abeyance. I would be grateful if you didn’t mention that to anyone. I haven’t spoken to him yet.” Hermione requested.

"Of course not, Snape. That would be highly bad-mannered of me." Nott was a little annoyed at her supposition.

Hermione colored. "I'm sorry but it's not like we're friends or anything. I don't know you well enough to know what you would do."

"You're right. I don't really have any friends, nor do I really want them. However, after the courtesy you've shown me today, I might be willing to make an exception for you." Nott held out his hand.

Remembering her father's lecture on pureblood politics, Hermione took Nott's hand in her own and shook it quickly. "Thank you, Nott."

"Please, call me Theo." The boy stood up to leave.

"Then please call me Hermione." Hermione shut the door on his retreating figure.

Theo walked swiftly back down to the common room. He was surprised that Hermione had bothered to inform him of her decision in person. Most Slytherins wouldn't have had the decency to explain their refusal; heck, most of them would have just smirked and laughed behind his back.

Theo had been telling the truth when he had informed Hermione that he didn't need or want friends. He knew exactly why he had decided to foster a casual friendship with Hermione; her father was very influential in the potions world, and Theo had aspirations in that direction. He had been planning to make an unsolicited overture to her in potions when partner assignments were made after Christmas, but today's discussion now obviated that need. Smirking, the boy resumed his original spot.

Up in her room, Hermione thought over her conversation with Nott. She didn't particularly want him as a friend but decided that it wouldn't hurt to have the boy on her side. He was extremely intelligent; his test scores were usually only second to the Ravensclaws and her own. As he rarely interacted with others in school, and tended to spend more time observing than joining in,

Hermione speculated that he may have more insight into people than some realized.

Looking at the schoolwork that sat on her desk, Hermione grimaced; she'd really rather have spent her Sunday morning doing something other than talking to Nott. Hermione pushed her regrets aside and decided to write to her mother.

Letters 2

Dear Mama

I know I only saw you last night but I really need your advice. Papa told me about the offers after you left. I have told him to refuse Notts' invitation. I didn't want to refuse Neville's straight away even though I don't like Neville in the same way I like Harry. I am worried that Harry might not feel the same about me as I do about him, and I don't want to refuse someone who, if I find out Harry doesn't like me, I might grow to like more, so I have put Neville's offer on hold. Do you think I did the right thing?

Mama, please write soon.

Love

Hermione xx

Darling Hermione,

You did the right thing with the proposals but if you decide before Neville's 14th birthday that you will not ever have any romantic feelings for him, please tell him and don't let him wait to find out from a refusal. It would be far kinder to let him down gently than to string him along.

I know how you feel about Harry. Boys rarely know their own minds at this age, so please be patient. Just continue to be Harry's friend and be there if he ever needs you. However, Hermione, don't spend your life chasing after something that might not ever happen. If you need me, I'm always here for you.

Dominic sends you a baby hug and Livvy and Seb both say hi.

Take care.

Love

Mama xxx

Dear Mum

I have just spoken with Hermione and she has asked for my proposal to be placed in abeyance until I am 14. Please will you accept this abeyance? I really like Hermione and don't want you to take back the proposal just because she hasn't said yes yet.

I miss you and Seville. Please write and tell me what is happening.

Love

Neville

Dear Neville

I have not retracted the proposal and have already written to the Snapes to say that I am happy to wait until your 14th birthday for a formal answer. If you decide that you do not want to wait until then because you have changed your mind, please write and tell me. I will then retract your offer.

Study hard and take care of yourself.

Love

Mum xxx

Dear Nev

I can't wait for Christmas. Sorry Hermi didn't say yes. I wanted her to be my big sister. I won't see you at Christmas. I'm going to stay with

Aunt Gertie for a few weeks in New York. Mum thinks it will be good for me to see how muggles live so I know how lucky I am to be a witch. I begged her to let me go some other time but she said no.

I miss you Nev.

Love

Sevvie xxxx

Dear Sevvie

You will have fun with Aunt Gertie. I did when I went there. Muggles have a good time as well, just don't tell Mum. I'll miss you.

Love

Nev xx

17th October 1992

Roger Davies watched as Harry hovered above the quidditch pitch waiting for Madam Hooch to blow her whistle to signal the start of the game now that the warm-up period was over. Cho had come down with the wizard flu just a few days ago, and Harry had had to step in as first string seeker.

Harry was hovering above the pitch feeling nervous, when he spotted Potter coming towards him.

"What gives you the right to send my girlfriend chocolates, Lupin?" Jamie snarled at Harry as soon as he was within hearing range.

"She's not just your girlfriend, Potter. She's also my teammate. I felt bad about taking her spot in the first game." Harry decided to try and keep things on an even keel.

Jamie sneered. "And so you should. I'm going to wipe the floor with you."

All thoughts of neutrality flew out of the window. "You can try."

"I don't need to try, Lupin. I was born better than you, I have a better broom than you and I can fly better than you with one hand tied behind my back." Jamie's tone had now turned nasty.

"Birth has nothing to do with it, Potter, and as for your broom, it's only as good as the flier on it. An average flier on a good broom is still an average flier." Harry retorted.

"A bit like you then." Jamie laughed maliciously, and flew off as Lee Jordan began introducing the players.

"From glorious Gryffindor we have our illustrious captain and keeper, Oliver Wood; our charming chasers, Angelina Johnson, Katie Bell and Alicia Spinnet; our bad boy beaters, Cormac McLaggen and Kenneth Towler, and finally, our super seeker, Jamieeee Potter."

A huge roar went up from the Gryffindor supporters, as Jamie flew around waving at everyone.

"From Ravenclaw, we have Roger Davies, captain and chaser. Joining him are chasers Amelia Galloway and Jonathan Bradley, and trying to stop the brave Gryffindor players from scoring are keeper Catherine Sherrington and beaters, George Weasley and Dudley Lupin. Finally, seeker Harry Lupin replaces the lovely Cho Chang."

Professor McGonagall had been gesturing to Lee to stop his biased commentary during his entire speech, but the boy had ignored her and carried on regardless. Giving up, she settled down to watch the match; at least he hadn't been rude about the Ravenclaw players. That was something Lee tended to save especially for Slytherin.

Madam Hooch blew her whistle to bring the players to order. "Everyone to their positions."

All fourteen players moved to their assigned spots. The quaffle was released and Madam Hooch flew up high above the players; from here she could referee the game from an advantageous angle.

Lee's commentary could be heard over the entire field. "Spinnet has the quaffle. She passes to Bell. Sherrington comes out from goal ready to capture. Bell passes back to Spinnet who throws it high over Sherrington's head towards the goal and she scores!"

A huge groan went up from the Ravenclaw supporters.

"Nice move from Davies as Johnson moves to intercept. Johnson's missed. Davies passes to Galloway; watch out for that bludger." McLaggen had sent a bludger hurtling in Galloway's direction.

"Galloway ducks and Bell takes a bludger to the head." Lee was on his feet, as were the Gryffindor fans as Bell dropped off her broom and headed for the ground. A collective gasp rose from the spectators.

"She's okay everyone. A heroic save there by Ravenclaw team captain, Roger Davies." Flying right behind Galloway, Roger had seen what was about to happen and had immediately flown under Katie to avoid the bludger, allowing him to grab her as she fell.

The game continued around the injured girl as she was tended to by Madam Pomfrey, who had decided that with only one patient in the infirmary, Cho could be monitored by Imelda Grant, a seventh year with an interest in becoming a healer.

Lee picked up his commentary on the game again. "Galloway has the quaffle, she's heading for the goal. She's passes to Bradley. Bradley fools Wood with a feigned throwback and scores."

This time it was the Ravenclaws who leapt to their feet to cheer, and the Gryffindors left groaning in dismay.

After twenty minutes and one substitution, the score was 50-30 in favor of Gryffindor. Jamie Potter continued to fly around Harry making derogatory remarks.

Harry watched as Jamie flew off again, scanning the field. Suddenly Harry spotted a gold flash which was more than half way between

himself and Jamie. Bending low over his broom, Harry exploded into action.

Lee had spotted what had attracted Harry's attention. "Lupin's spotted the snitch."

Jamie hadn't been looking in the right direction and quickly turned after Lee's remark. He was still closer to the snitch than Lupin. He also bent low over his broom, and, entirely confident in his own abilities, shot forward to catch the snitch before Lupin could. He was going to win this game for Gryffindor!

"Both seekers are almost there. Potter's going to get the snitch." The crowd erupted with loud screams and yells.

"Potter's just inches away. No, he's missed it; the snitch has veered off. Lupin and Potter are neck and neck now." Lee's voice had risen audibly.

The entire audience were on their feet.

Hermione hated quidditch but even she had agreed to come and watch Harry play his first game. She joined the rest of the school on her feet and screamed, "Come on Harry, you can do it."

Next to her, Luna was also on her feet chanting "Harry, Harry, Harry."

Soon one house was vying with the other as the Ravenclaw supporters took up the chant started by Luna, and in retaliation Gryffindor started to chant Jamie's name.

The two boys raced side by side as the snitch once more careened off in a new direction; this time it headed towards the ground. Harry didn't care if he broke every bone in his body; he was determined to beat Potter no matter what it took. For the first time in his life, he felt as though he was flying without wings.

The snitch got lower and lower to the ground and both boys hurriedly pulled up on their brooms to avoid a wipe-out. The snitch fluttered just in front of them; out of the corner of his eye, Harry watched as Dudley

deliberately placed himself in front a bludger that had been heading his way, sending it hurtling back towards McLaggen. Harry flattened himself onto his broom and slowly started to pull away from Jamie. The snitch suddenly shot off to the left of him. In desperation, Harry let go of his broom and flung himself sideways. His hand wrapped around the tiny ball just as he impacted the ground.

“Lupin catches the snitch.” Lee flatly announced the result. “Ravenclaw wins by 180 to 50.”

The other Ravenclaws flew down to join Harry, and he soon disappeared under his overjoyed teammates’ bodies as they all tried to congratulate him at once.

Madam Pomfrey came rushing over to the group, pushing everyone aside to get to Harry. She had only just finished patching Katie Bell up and so hadn’t yet left the ground. Waving her wand over Harry she clucked. “You are very lucky, Mr. Lupin. You appear to have no more than a few bad bruises. Please come to the infirmary when you are finished here, and I will give you salve to put on them.” She then rushed off to catch up with Severus, who had agreed to take Katie to the infirmary for her.

Roger pulled Harry to one side, out of earshot of everyone else. “Great game there, Harry. You gave me quite a shock when you leapt from your broom. I’ve spoken with Madam Hooch and we both agree that you should be promoted to the seeker position on a permanent basis.”

After watching Harry play during the practice sessions, Roger realized that he had made a mistake in giving the seeker’s spot to Cho. Harry was absolutely phenomenal on a broom and had been beating Cho to the snitch every time. Roger had agreed with Madam Hooch that if Harry won this game, he would replace Cho. He didn’t feel good about doing it but Cho just wasn’t as good as Harry; the team had to come first.

“But what about Cho?” Harry had enjoyed the game more than he ever thought possible and now badly wanted the position, but he was more than a little reluctant to upset his teammate.

"I'm going to tell her now that she has been bumped down to reserve." Roger explained.

Harry contemplated how he would feel if it was him. "I'd like to tell her. I think it's only fair as I'll be the one taking her place."

"That's very brave of you Harry. If you really feel that strongly about it, then I'm happy for you to tell her." Roger felt a little relieved. He hadn't been looking forward to the conversation.

Harry turned and headed straight for the school. He needed to go and tell Cho now before she learnt of it from somebody else.

Harry entered the infirmary. Katie was already tucked up in bed and sleeping; Imelda Grant seated next to her.

"Mr. Lupin. Please come here." The matron called Harry over. "You need to rub this salve in for the few next days. Any problems come back and see me."

Harry thanked her and headed for Cho's private room. He'd already had wizarding flu when he was small and so didn't need to be quarantined from the girl. Harry knocked on the door.

"Come in." Cho immediately sat up when she saw it was Harry. "Did we win?"

Harry held up the snitch which he passed to the bedridden girl. "Of course we did."

Cho took the snitch and then passed it back to Harry. "It's yours; you've earned it."

Harry shook his head. "I want you to have it."

For someone who had just won his first quidditch match, Harry's face was rather serious, and Cho had a sudden insight into what Harry was about to say. "I've been dropped, haven't I?"

“I’m sorry. Roger just told me. I’m not going to accept the position if it’s going to damage our friendship.” Harry looked at the girl who was trying not to cry.

Cho shook her head and took a deep breath. “Roger’s right. You are the better seeker and you know what he always says; we’ve got to do what’s best for the team, and you are best for the team. Congratulations, Harry.” Cho couldn’t hold her tears back any longer, and started to cry quietly.

Harry reached out and pulled Cho into his arms and gently rubbed the girl’s back. He really liked Cho and didn’t like seeing her upset. “I really am sorry.”

Cho lifted up her face to say something to Harry, who tenderly brushed back her hair out of her eyes so that he could see her face properly.

“What the hell do you think you are doing, Lupin?” None of them had noticed Jamie coming into the room.

Cho forestalled Harry’s attempt to answer. “He’s just come to tell me about my position on the team.”

Jamie walked up to the pair, who were still wrapped up in each other’s arms, and pulled Harry away from Cho. “What about your position?”

Harry remained silent.

“He’s first string now.” Cho said quietly. “Harry, I think you’d better go.”

“Yeah, Lupin, get lost.” Jamie sat down on the bed next to Cho and put his arm around her.

Harry ignored Jamie. “Cho, please take the snitch.” He held it out to the girl.

“Thank you.” Cho reached out and took it from him.

Harry turned and left just as Cho burst into tears again.

“Cho, please don’t cry. We can make it better.” Jamie took Harry’s vacated spot and drew the girl into his embrace. “You could appeal. You’re far better than Lupin.”

Cho shook her head, tears streaming down her face. “I’m not. It was a fair decision.”

“I can’t believe that you’re just going to lie back and let him take this away from you.” Jamie snarled at his girlfriend.

Cho was a little taken aback. She had never seen Jamie act like this before. “I did the best I could. Harry was better. At least he had the guts to come and tell me himself.”

“That’s only because he fancies you.” Jamie bit out.

Despite of her misery, Cho smiled at Jamie’s obvious jealousy. “Harry is really sweet and he would do the same for anyone on the team, not just me.”

Jamie disagreed. “I want you to keep away from him.”

“What?” Cho was surprised at Jamie’s ferocity.

Jamie softened his voice. “I know you don’t think he likes you but he’s sent you chocolates, and now he’s given you his first snitch.”

“I’ve already told you, Harry would have done the same for anyone else. If it had been Roger lying here, he would now have Harry’s snitch and not me.” Cho protested.

Deciding that he didn’t want to aggravate his girlfriend any further, Jamie relented. “Perhaps you’re right. I’m sorry. I’m just upset about losing the match to him.”

“I understand. Please let’s just forget all about Harry and talk about something else.” Cho pleaded.

“Okay. What do you think of the Tornados’ chances next match?” Jamie knew that talking about quidditch would cheer Cho up.

The two got into a heated debate about Cho’s favorite team until it was time for Jamie to leave. He kissed his girlfriend and returned to Gryffindor tower.

Harry left the ward and headed up the stairs back towards Ravenclaw tower, only to bump into a rather white-faced and bedraggled looking Draco Black coming from the second floor.

“Draco, are you okay?” Harry thought the boy looked a little dazed.

“What?” Draco’s voice sounded a little slurred.

“You don’t look well, and your robes are covered in dirt. Did you fall somewhere?” Harry asked the boy.

Draco didn’t know how he’d dirtied his robes or why he couldn’t remember what he’d been doing. He didn’t want to tell Harry, so he lied instead. “I slipped at the bottom of the stairs, and banged my head.”

“Can I take you to Madam Pomfrey?” Harry wanted to know.

“No, I’m okay now. I think I’m going to go back to the tower and lie down.” Draco smiled trying to look as if he was in control, when in reality he felt really frightened at his own amnesia, and wanted nothing more than to confide in someone.

“Okay, but I’m going that way myself, so I’ll keep you company.” Even though Draco’s color had returned, Harry didn’t feel good about letting the boy walk around on his own.

Neither boy spoke during their walk up to Ravenclaw tower. As they stepped into the common room, it was obvious that the team had decided that celebrating was the order of the day; bottles of butterbeer and plates of food filled a table at the back of the room.

Not bothering to join in, Draco left Harry standing at the door and headed off towards the boys' dormitories.

Seeing Harry come in, Luna ran up to him and threw her arms around his neck. Harry put his arms around the girl to steady them as her actions had threatened to send the pair tumbling to the floor. Luna, misreading Harry's intentions, reached up and kissed him on lips. Harry was extremely shocked; he hadn't been expecting the kiss. Gently, he removed Luna's arms from his around his neck, slipped her hand into his and pulled her towards the exit to the tower.

"Where do you think you're going?" George yelled.

"We'll be back shortly." Harry gave a perfunctory response, as he pulled Luna out of the common room; catcalls following them until the door finally closed blocking the noise out.

Back in the common room, Hermione sat feeling numb. Dudley had invited her to join the celebrations. For all of her concerns about being in a different house's common room, no-one had seemed bothered that Dudley had brought a Slytherin into Ravenclaw tower. She had seen Harry coming into the common room with Draco Black and had been about to jump up to congratulate him, when Luna had dashed across the room and thrown herself at Harry. Hermione had felt her heart contract when Harry had wrapped his arms around the girl drawing her close. The final straw for Hermione had been Harry's obvious need for a little privacy to continue the kiss that Luna had initiated.

"Dudley, I think the noise is becoming a little too much for me. As soon as they come back in, I'm going to head off back to Slytherin." Hermione wore a false smile as she spoke to Dudley, who seemed a little distracted himself.

"Do you want me to walk you back?" Dudley offered.

Hermione shook her head. "I'll be fine. I'm just going to stand by the exit so that I can slip out when they come back."

Outside the door, Harry turned to Luna. "Luna, I don't know how to say this but..."

Luna interrupted. "Don't you like me, Harry?"

"Of course I do."

Luna's face lit up.

"But not like that. I'm sorry, but I only think of you as a sister." Harry felt really bad about upsetting his friend but he didn't want her thinking that they could be any more than friends.

Luna promptly burst into tears. Harry sighed and pulled the girl into his arms, rubbing her back in the same way as he had done with Cho earlier that evening. What was it with him and crying girls?

"Do you like someone else?" Luna sniffled.

Harry didn't answer. Luna persisted. "You do like someone don't you?"

Harry nodded reluctantly.

"Who is it?" Despite her misery, Luna still needed to know.

"Someone who I can't have." It was Harry's turn to look miserable now.

"Why not?"

Harry sighed. "She's already got someone."

Luna thought for a moment. "Is it Cho?"

"Why would you think it was Cho?" Harry wasn't going to admit to who it was to Luna. He felt bad enough telling her liked someone, let alone who the girl in question was.

“Well, you were really nice to her when she broke her broom during practice. You even offered to let her use your new broom.” Luna observed.

“That doesn’t mean I like her. I’d do that for any of my teammates.” Harry pointed out.

“You took her chocolates.” Luna decided that she was on the right track and it must be Cho.

Harry tried using logic. “I felt sorry that she was going to miss the first game of the season and I was going to be playing today instead.”

Luna snorted. “That was one big box. You should have seen Potter’s face when someone told him just before the match that you’d sent his girlfriend chocolates. He wasn’t happy.”

Harry grinned. “No wonder he was so nice to me about it at the game today!”

“You really don’t like Potter do you?” Luna asked Harry.

Harry thought for a moment before replying. “Honestly, no I don’t. I think he’s spoiled and full of himself. I tried at the game today to be pleasant but he just kept on being rude. He didn’t realize that it made me even more determined than ever to win the game. He was even worse when I was giving Cho the snitch.”

“You saw Cho after the game, and you gave her the winning snitch?” Luna was now totally convinced that Harry had a major crush on the pretty Chinese girl.

“I had to tell her that I was going to be taking her position. Roger told me after the match.” Harry explained. “I gave her the snitch to try and make her feel better.”

“Poor Cho. But congratulations on making the team. Roger never said anything.” Luna threw herself at Harry again.

Harry gently unwrapped the girl's arms from around him. "Thanks but I think Roger didn't want to tell everyone until after I had spoken to Cho."

Luna shivered. "I'm sorry I've made you feel uncomfortable again. Can we go back inside now?"

"You didn't make me feel uncomfortable. It made me feel really good that someone as wonderful as you would like me." Harry told the girl.

Luna settled for just smiling at Harry. "Thanks for being so nice about it."

"Luna, you're one of my best friends." Harry said, smiling back.

"Only one of them?" Luna teased, as they headed back into the common room to more catcalls and wolf whistles.

As they entered the room, Hermione slipped out unnoticed.

George yelled out "So are you two dating then?"

Luna climbed onto a chair. "I want to make an announcement."

Everyone fell silent.

"Harry is going to be..." she hesitated, unable to resist teasing everyone "my best friend forever."

Luna, for all her flightiness, was a sensible girl. She had had to be in order to cope with her Uncle and his quirks. Deciding that if Harry didn't like her romantically, then it was better to forget the whole thing, rather than mooning over him.

Harry laughed at Luna's announcement and swung the girl down from the chair.

Dudley had been sitting in the corner with Su Li, Padma and Hermione when Luna had landed a kiss on his brother. He'd been very surprised to discover that that Luna's kiss with Harry bothered

him. Dudley had never felt jealous of his brother before but all of a sudden he wanted to punch Harry in the face. Harry had got the girl Dudley hadn't even realized that he wanted; now it was too late for him.

The pair came back into the room. Dudley watched as Luna climbed onto a table and started to make an announcement. His heart felt as if it was going to stop. Had Harry proposed? Dudley knew that wizarding families often made marriage proposals at a young age. When Luna had called Harry her best friend forever, Dudley had wanted to jump up and down and yell his joy to the world. He made up his mind there and then to ask Luna to be his girlfriend at Christmas. He would have done it now but he had a feeling that she might need a little time to get over her disappointment about Harry.

Luna saw Dudley sitting in the corner and went over to him. "Hi Dudley. Did you hear, I'm your brother's new best friend. I'm going to be yours too." Luna plonked herself unceremoniously onto Dudley's lap and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Don't you wish that everyone was as lucky as me?" Luna asked the two girls.

Both girls laughed and watched as Luna gave Dudley another hug and then disappeared into the celebrating crowd.

Padma looked at Dudley. "I sometimes think that that girl is not quite right in the head."

Dudley responded angrily. "She's really sweet and I think that that's a mean thing to say, Padma." He got out of his seat and stalked off to speak to Harry.

Padma turned to Su Li. "I don't think Dudley wants Luna for his friend, do you?"

Su Li agreed with her friend. The two girls then began to discuss their favorite subject, Professor Lockhart.

Dudley found Harry talking to Roger. "Sorry Roger but I need to speak to Harry. Harry, Hermione just left here. She'd been waiting to speak to you but suddenly decided that she wasn't feeling so good. She wouldn't let me walk her back to Slytherin."

"Thanks Dudley. I'll catch up with her and make sure that she is okay." Harry dashed out of the tower, anxious to make sure that his friend made it back to the dungeons safely.

After leaving the tower, Hermione headed down the stairs intent on getting back to the dungeons. As she passed the second floor landing, she decided that may as well check out the transfiguration text she had forgotten to get the last time she was in the library. It would also give her some time to pull herself together before facing Daphne and the other Slytherins. As she walked up the corridor, she spotted something hanging from a lighting bracket. As she got closer she realized it was Mrs. Norris, Filch's cat. On the wall behind the cat the words 'The Chamber of Secrets has been opened. Enemies of the Heir beware.' were scrawled in what looked like blood.

Alarmed, Hermione backed up, only to come to a stop when she connected with a warm body. Hermione screamed.

As she turned, she came face to face with Filch who literally spat his words into her face. "You killed my cat."

Hermione shook her head. "It wasn't me. I was just on my way to the library when I found her like this and that writing on the wall."

Filch grabbed her by the hair, not listening to what Hermione had said. "You killed my cat and now you're going to pay for it."

"Let go of my hair." Hermione tried to pull free, only for Filch to put his hand over her mouth and start to drag her along the corridor.

Frightened now, Hermione tried to resist.

Filch just held the girl tighter. "You should have thought of what would happen to you when you killed my cat."

“Let her go.” Harry’s voice rang out from behind the struggling pair.

Filch turned. “She killed my cat and she’s got to be punished for it. I’ve been keeping my chains oiled and whip ready for something like this.”

Harry decided that Filch had gone over the edge. “I can’t let you do that. Now let her go.”

Madam Pince, on hearing the commotion, came out of the library. “Argus, what is going on?”

Filch turned to her. “This one killed my cat. She’s going to pay for it.”

Irma hated the children at Hogwarts; they were always messing with her books. She therefore wasn’t too unhappy about one of them being dealt with by Filch in such a manner. She personally agreed with Argus that Dumbledore was too easy going with the children. If she had taken the time to look properly at who Filch had been holding she might have reconsidered her actions. “Don’t let me stop you then.”

“No.” Harry yelled. “He’s not taking her anywhere.”

By now Hermione was crying and had frantically redoubled her efforts in trying to get free from the repulsive caretaker who just laughed at her. “Stop struggling; it’ll do you no good.”

“I said let her go.” Harry’s voice had now become low and threatening. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the librarian begin to pull out of her wand. “Stupefy.”

Irma Pince hadn’t expected Harry to attack her, and with no defense, she collapsed unconscious onto the floor.

“When I’m finished with this one, I’m going to come back and deal with you too.” Filch yanked on Hermione’s hair as he spoke.

Deciding he wasn’t going to get anywhere in ordering the caretaker to let go of his friend, Harry acted. “Stupefy.”

The spell hit the caretaker full in the face and he joined Irma Pince on the floor; the momentum pulling Hermione down with him.

Harry dashed over and rolled the caretaker off his friend. "Hermione, come on, let's get out of here."

Hermione was shaking uncontrollably, tears rolling down her cheeks.

"What in Merlin's name is going on here?" Albus Dumbledore came hurrying up the corridor; his face looking angry and displaying none of its usual geniality. "Miss Snape. Please tell me at once."

Hermione couldn't speak and just carrying on crying. Harry intervened, the words tumbling swiftly out of his mouth. "Sir, I heard Hermione scream so I came running to find out what was going on. I found Filch pulling her along by her hair with his hand over her mouth. He was threatening to punish her, saying that Hermione had killed his cat. Madam Pince was going to let him."

"So you attacked them?" Dumbledore couldn't believe it.

"Madam Pince drew her wand on me and I couldn't let Filch take Hermione. I stunned Madam Pince and when he wouldn't listen to me, I stunned Filch as well." Harry defended himself.

"You will escort Miss Snape to the dungeons and when you have done so, you will immediately return to speak to me in my office. The password is "Butterfingers". Dumbledore ordered Harry.

Harry hadn't thought about the repercussions from his actions. "Yes, Sir."

Hermione had stopped crying but was still shaking as she clung to Harry.

After they had put some distance between them and the headmaster, Harry stopped and turned to look at Hermione. "Do you want me to take you to your Dad's rooms?" He didn't think it would be a good idea for her to be on her own that night.

She just nodded and the pair continued on their way until they reached Severus' door where Harry raised his hand and rapped sharply on it.

"This had better be..." Severus' words were cut off as the door opened to reveal his shaking daughter clinging desperately to Harry Lupin.

On seeing her father, Hermione screamed "Papa", released Harry and threw herself into Severus' arms, crying hysterically.

Severus gave Harry a look which Harry read as 'don't move or else', as Severus gently steered the girl towards the cabinet at the back of the sitting room. He opened a cupboard in the cabinet and took out a vial containing a dark purple liquid.

"Sweetheart, drink this." Severus coaxed his daughter into swallowing the contents of the vial.

Hermione drank the draught and slumped into Severus' arms.

"Salty." Severus yelled out, as he lifted his daughter and marched into one of the bedrooms off his sitting room.

The appearance of the house elf startled Harry. "Yes, Master Snape, sir."

Severus lowered Hermione onto the bed and covered her over with some of the blankets from the foot of the bed. "Get Bright. She is to stay with Hermione tonight."

Not stopping long enough to respond, Salty disappeared and moments later a female house elf was standing in his place. "Bright watch Missy Hermione."

"If she wakes, get me immediately." Severus ordered the house elf.

The elf nodded and sat down at the bottom of the bed.

Severus left the room and closed the door. "Now Lupin, you will tell me what has happened to Hermione."

Severus sat down. Harry didn't dare copy Severus and continued standing while he told his teacher everything he knew about what had happened.

"I will come with you to see Dumbledore." Severus told Harry.

Harry turned and headed out of the door with Severus following closely behind.

A big thanks to Jarno for filling me in on his reasons behind his review comments. It is because of him that I decided to give Harry what he deserved a little earlier than I'd originally planned, the number one spot on the Ravenclaw team.

Have a good Memorial Day.

Chapter 18: Revelations

Harry followed Severus to the gargoyles that guarded the entrance to the Headmaster's office.

"Chewitts" Severus spat out at the gargoyles.

Nothing happened. Harry stepped up. "Butterfingers". The gargoyles swung back and allowed them entrance to the staircase that led to the Headmaster's office.

Dumbledore looked up as Severus and Harry entered his office. "Mr. Lupin, I thought I told you to take Miss Snape back to the dungeons and then return straight back here."

Severus stepped in front of Harry. "My daughter was distraught, and needed a sleeping potion. Mr. Lupin sensibly brought her to me."

Dumbledore was angry that Harry had disobeyed him. He hadn't wanted Severus to know about what had happened until he had had time to twist the facts to suit his own purposes. "Mr. Lupin, ten points from Ravenclaw for disobeying a teacher."

Harry said nothing.

"Please both be seated."

Harry sat down and Severus followed suit.

"Mr. Lupin, I have thought about a suitable punishment for your actions against Mr. Filch and Madam Pince and, even though I would normally expel a student for attacking a member of staff, because you mistakenly believed you were defending a fellow student, I have decided not to expel you this time." Dumbledore looked sternly at Harry.

Harry let out the breath he had been holding.

"However, you will serve detention with Mr. Filch for a month for your actions."

Harry was horrified; he knew that Filch would make his life more than just miserable and, after seeing the way the man had treated Hermione, Harry was more than a little worried about his own safety.

"I cannot let you do this, Headmaster. Mr. Lupin was protecting my daughter." Severus stepped in on Harry's behalf.

"Mr. Lupin, please leave." Dumbledore ordered. "Wait out..."

"Mr. Lupin, stay where you are." Severus ordered Harry to remain. He then turned his attention back to Dumbledore. "Mr. Lupin has allegedly committed an offence in protecting a member of my family. I therefore demand, as head of the household for the injured party in this matter, that he be allowed to stay. I wish him to bear witness to my request for retribution."

Dumbledore knew that, as the party seeking retribution for damage done to an innocent member of his family, Severus could demand whomever he wanted to act as witness. "Do you formally request then that Mr. Lupin be allowed to act as a witness in this matter?"

"I do." Severus confirmed.

"In that case, let us formalize the proceedings. I wish for Mr. Lupin to act not only as an impartial witness, but also as the judge of the final outcome." Dumbledore declared, believing Harry would be easy to sway to his side.

"I agree that Mr. Lupin is to remain as witness and judge, if he so agrees." Severus held up his wand and touched it to Dumbledore's own.

Dumbledore turned to look at Harry, who was looking a little bewildered. "Mr. Lupin, do you agree to serve as witness and judge?"

Harry's curiosity got the better of him, and he agreed to stay. "Yes."

"Do you swear on your magic to listen to both sides of the argument and to give a fair decision based on the facts?" Dumbledore asked.

Harry opened his mouth to speak but was forestalled by Severus. "Mr. Lupin, if you agree to these terms, and you do not judge these proceedings fairly, then your magic will become forfeit. If you are happy to serve as witness and judge, you must state your understanding, and touch your wand to both my own and the Headmaster's."

Harry gulped. "I understand and agree."

Harry copied his teachers' earlier actions and touched his wand to both of theirs. Light filled the room before it fell back, shimmering like orange and silver flames, becoming a barrier surrounding Dumbledore's office.

Noticing Harry's surprised expression, Dumbledore explained. "This is the Fire of Justice and Truth. It will not dissipate until a break is called, or these proceedings are over and justice has been served. Let us proceed."

"I, Severus Snape, acting as Head and Heir of the Snape family, seek formal retribution against Argus Filch for injuries suffered by my daughter, Hermione Snape, at Argus Filch's own hand." Severus stated his claim.

"I, Albus Dumbledore, acting as defender and friend of Argus Filch, ask that you lay forth your claims and demands." Albus responded.

Severus made clear his position on the matter. "Argus Filch claimed that my daughter killed his cat. I disagree with his assertion, and do declare that Argus Filch willfully attacked my daughter."

"How do you know that your daughter did not kill his cat?" Dumbledore demanded to know.

"I believe in my daughter, and know that she would never harm an innocent animal. To disprove her guilt, I will need to know when the cat died." Severus knew that timing was everything.

"The spell I used on the cat showed that it had been dead for about half an hour before I found Miss Snape and Mr. Lupin standing by it." Dumbledore responded.

Severus turned to Harry. "Mr. Lupin, can you please tell us both what happened before you found the cat?"

"Hermione had been with my brother in Ravenclaw tower, waiting for me to return from the hospital wing." Harry explained.

"Why were you in the hospital wing?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"I had to get some salve from Madam Pomfrey for my bruises, and to speak to Cho Chang." Harry told them. "When I left the wing, I went straight back to Ravenclaw tower where Hermione was waiting with Dudley."

"Why didn't you escort Miss Snape back down to the dungeons if she had been waiting for you?" Dumbledore wanted to know.

"I didn't see Hermione when I first went into the tower. I then stepped outside for a few moments to discuss a private matter with someone. When I went back in, I had just started to speak to Roger Davies when Dudley came up to me. He told me that Hermione had just left and wasn't feeling well. I ran to see if I could catch her up and walk her back to the dungeons. She wasn't that much further in front of me when I heard her scream." Harry felt as if it was him on trial, and not Filch.

"We need to check with Mr. Lupin's brother as to how long Hermione had been in Ravenclaw tower." Severus pointed out.

"I agree. We will need to temporarily stop the proceedings. Mr. Lupin, do you agree to this action?" Dumbledore asked Harry.

"I do." Harry wasn't really sure of what he was doing, but went along with it anyway.

The wall surrounding the office shimmered and collapsed. Dumbledore walked up to the fireplace and stuck his head into it, after throwing in a small amount of floo power.

Dumbledore called out. "Professor Flitwick."

Moments later, the diminutive professor's head appeared in the fireplace. "What can I do for you, Headmaster?"

"We need to speak to Dudley Lupin. He may come directly through to my office." Dumbledore informed the head of Ravenclaw.

Ten minutes later a sleepy looking Dudley was standing in Dumbledore's office. "Sir, you wanted to see me?"

"Yes. The proceedings can now continue if that is acceptable to Mr. Lupin." Dumbledore stated.

Harry nodded, and the fiery light once more surrounded the office, startling Dudley.

Severus turned to the newcomer. "Can you tell me how long my daughter had been in Ravenclaw Tower for before she left and why she was there? Before you speak, I should tell you that need to be entirely honest in your answer. There will be dire consequences should you fail to do so."

Dudley gulped nervously before answering. "She was there for about an hour. She had wanted to see Harry after the match, and he had had to go to the hospital wing first. Harry then came back, and went straight out of the Tower again to talk to Luna. Hermione said that she wasn't feeling well, and when Harry came back in she was going to go."

Dumbledore stepped in with his own question. "What happened then?"

Feeling even more nervous, Dudley started to babble. "After Harry came in, Hermione slipped out. Luna told everyone that Harry was

her best friend, and then he got her off the chair she was standing on, and..."

Severus impatiently interrupted the boy. "Mr. Lupin, how much time had elapsed between Hermione and Harry leaving the Tower?"

"Just a few minutes." Dudley told the man.

"That is all we need. You can go now, Mr. Lupin." Severus told the boy. "Harry, if you would please allow a short recess once more."

Harry just nodded, and the light again disappeared from the room.

Before leaving, Dudley turned to Harry. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Dudley. I'm not sure when I'll be back though." Harry responded.

Dudley returned to Ravenclaw Tower through the fireplace, and the proceedings resumed once more.

"As the Justice Fire did not burn Mr. Lupin, we can assume he was telling the truth. My daughter, therefore, could not have killed the cat." Severus stated.

Harry was rather appalled to find out that the fire could have burnt his brother if he'd lied. He had expected the consequences Severus had mentioned to be detention, not the risk of immolation.

Knowing that he had no choice in the matter, Dumbledore yielded. "I am in accord that Hermione was not in a position to kill the cat."

"I am therefore within my rights to demand retribution for Argus Filch's actions." Severus intoned.

"In his defense, Mr. Filch was in shock, and he truly believed that your daughter had killed his cat. The loss of his cat was like losing his family all over again." Dumbledore argued.

Harry wondered what Dumbledore was talking about. Had Filch been married before? Harry shuddered at the thought of anyone being married to the caretaker.

"He chose to cut himself off from his family. My daughter did not choose to be attacked." Severus pointed out.

Dumbledore sighed. "What do you seek in retribution?"

"I want Argus Filch removed from this school." Severus demanded.

Dumbledore turned to Harry. "Mr. Lupin, do you agree with this action?"

As much as Harry wanted to say yes, he couldn't. He remembered how he had felt when he thought he would lose his Dad at the airport. If Filch regarded the cat as his family, Harry knew how awful he must have felt when he saw his cat's body hanging from the light fixture, and how he must have wanted someone to blame.

"I don't." Harry responded.

"Why not?" Severus demanded.

"Because I think that Mr. Filch only attacked Hermione because he was upset, and really did think that she had killed his cat." Harry explained the reasoning behind his refusal.

Severus swore under his breath. "In that case, I demand a public apology for my daughter, and Filch's oath that he will never touch her again."

Before Harry had a chance to respond, Dumbledore jumped in. "But the students will lose respect for Mr. Filch if he has to do this. I will ask him to apologize, but in private. Mr. Lupin, do you agree with this?"

Harry once more answered negatively. "No, I don't. I think Mr. Filch's apology should be made public."

This time it was Dumbledore's turn to question Harry's response. "Why not privately? It will still be an apology."

Harry thought about all the times Filch had unmercifully harassed the students, never caring if he hurt their feelings or embarrassed them. "Because he's embarrassed too many students before. I know from other students that he's dragged them through the corridors without letting them getting dressed after catching them in the Astronomy Tower." George had told him about his brother Charlie and his girlfriend being caught up there before by Filch.

"But you don't know for sure do you?" Dumbledore tried to use Harry's lack of solid evidence as leverage.

"I believe what I have been told to be the truth." Harry stated. The Justice Fire flickered but did not burn him.

Severus smirked. "So it is agreed then."

Dumbledore tried one last time. "Severus, please reconsider."

"No, I want a public apology and his oath. If he refuses then he must leave the school, as per my original demand. I also want Mr. Lupin's detention rescinded." Severus was adamant in his stipulations. He had also decided to ask for Harry's detention to be revoked after Harry had agreed to the public apology. Severus also knew that it would irk the Headmaster.

"We can discuss Mr. Lupin's detention after the matter of Mr. Filch has been dealt with." Dumbledore wasn't going to let a student get away with such behavior.

Severus stood his ground. "No, I want his detention revoked."

Ignoring Severus' demand, Dumbledore turned to Harry. "Is it your final determination that Argus Filch will publicly apologize to Miss Snape, and swear never to touch her again?"

"It is." Harry stated.

Dumbledore stood up. "The decision has now been formalized. Argus Filch will apologize publicly to your daughter and swear an oath never to touch her again. In return you must leave him alone, and not seek retribution against him."

"If Filch does as requested by Monday night, then I give you my word that I will not seek retribution against him in response to his actions this time. However, should he attack either my daughter again, or any other member of my family, I will not hesitate to seek him out and exact punishment upon him." Severus carefully worded his reply. He knew that if Filch attacked any other member of his family, Severus needed to be able to bring Filch to answer for his transgressions.

The fiery light flickered and shimmered, then swept towards the three men engulfing them. Moments later it dissipated and the room returned to normal.

Dumbledore moved to dismiss Severus. "If that is all..."

"The detention, Headmaster." Severus reminded Dumbledore.

"I cannot let a student attack a member of staff. An example has to be made." Dumbledore pointed out.

"Mr. Lupin can serve his detention with me then, but for one week." Severus bargained with the Headmaster.

Dumbledore relented. "I agree."

"Thank you." Severus now just wanted to get back to his rooms and check on Hermione.

Dumbledore turned to face Harry. "Mr. Lupin, you will serve your detention with Professor Snape at a time of his choosing. There is, however, still the matter of Madam Pince. She said that you attacked her first."

"That's not true." Harry defended himself as he looked up earnestly at the headmaster, resolutely meeting the Headmaster's gaze.

Moments later Dumbledore flew backwards across the room and into his chair. Looking a little dazed, Dumbledore pulled himself to his feet. Harry, however, was slumped unconscious in his chair, and suffering from a heavy nosebleed.

“Severus, take Mr. Lupin to the hospital wing. Please inform him when he regains consciousness that he will serve a week’s detention with Madam Pince.” Dumbledore thought that his head was going to split into two.

Feeling somewhat responsible for the boy’s predicament, Severus made a suggestion. “Might I propose that Mr. Lupin serve a second week’s detention with me? I will then agree to let any retribution I may seek against Madam Pince lay dormant unless she crosses me again.”

Not wanting any more trouble, and now eager to take something for his headache, Dumbledore agreed. “Fine. Now please escort Mr. Lupin to the hospital wing.”

“Of course.”

Not bothering with a levitation spell, Severus bodily picked Harry up. After just over a month of continuous quidditch practice, Harry had shed more than the few pounds of puppy fat he had been carrying and the boy was now almost as light as Hermione; Severus therefore had no problem in bearing his weight. However, instead of taking Harry to the hospital wing, Severus decided to take him back to his rooms. He knew that the Headmaster had tried to enter Harry’s mind, and Severus was curious to find out why Dumbledore had been so violently rebuffed.

On entering his rooms, Severus placed Harry on the chaise longue in the sitting room and, as he did so, Harry started to regain consciousness.

“Sir, what happened?” Harry tried to sit up, only for the room to start spinning.

“Sit back for a moment and drink this.” Severus handed Harry a glass of water.

Harry sipped the water and winced.

“Does your head hurt?” Severus asked.

Harry nodded, and then regretted the movement.

Severus moved to his fully stocked cabinet and withdrew a pain potion, which he passed to Harry.

Relief quickly filled Harry as he drank the potion; its effects were almost instantaneous. “Thank you, Sir.”

“Mr. Lupin, who taught you occlumency?” Snape asked quietly.

“Sorry, Professor, but I don’t know what you are talking about.” Harry had a vague recollection of the word but nothing more.

Severus wanted to explain what Dumbledore had been doing but unfortunately his oath of allegiance to Dumbledore prevented him from telling Harry.

“Occlumency is a form of magic which protects your mind. Legilimency is its mirror; you can use it to enter someone’s mind. Something happened to you in Professor Dumbledore’s office. I would like your permission to enter your mind using legilimency to find out what happened to you.” Severus explained.

For some unfathomable reason, Harry felt as if he could trust Professor Snape, and he decided to let the man try. “Okay.”

“Lean back into the pillows. Just relax and don’t try to fight me. I’ll be as gentle as I possibly can.” Severus explained, taking out his wand. “Legilimens.”

Harry felt a slight pressure in his mind; then remembering what the professor had said, he relaxed and let Severus in.

Severus was shocked on entering Harry's mind. He had expected images of quidditch pitches, or even Harry's bedroom. Instead the boy's mind looked like a battlefield covered with hundreds and hundreds of faceless bodies strewn all around. Worryingly, Severus felt totally comfortable in the middle of the devastation. In the center of the field was what looked like a huge stone wall. Severus headed towards it.

On reaching the wall, Severus found a door; it was unlocked. Severus entered to find another wall, this time made up of shrubs. After stepping through an archway, Severus discovered several pathways which led off in different directions; he had entered a maze. Wondering which way to go, Severus found himself being gently buffeted by a warm wind that was blowing in the direction of one of the pathways. The wind continued to blow until Severus had eventually reached the center, where it suddenly stopped.

There, floating in the very center of the maze itself was a slowly rotating sphere. The sphere had no discernable seams or method of entry. Severus walked up to it and as the sphere completed a full circle, Severus realized that there were markings on it. As he looked closer, he noticed that the markings were actually his family's crest. Below the crest lay another mark, which shocked Severus so much that he lost his concentration, and felt himself tumbling out of Harry's mind and back into his own.

As he became aware of his surroundings once more, Severus realized that Harry was screaming. "Mr. Lupin, wake up."

Harry continued to scream. Severus changed his approach, and decided to treat Harry as he would his own children. Gently stroking the boy's hair, Severus spoke softly to the distressed boy. "Harry, Harry, its okay. Nothing's going to hurt you." Harry's screams started to lessen as Severus continued his ministrations.

All of a sudden Harry shot up, and looked at Severus. "Father, oh, Father, I thought I'd lost you forever." Harry started to cry and threw himself at Severus, who instinctively wrapped his arms around the boy.

Hermione stepped through the bedroom door and into the sitting room. She had just dismissed Bright when she'd heard Harry screaming. Thinking that her father was hurting Harry for what had happened to her, Hermione ran out of the bedroom, only to come to a halt when she saw her father holding a sobbing Harry.

Severus heard a noise and turned to his daughter. "Hermione, what you are doing up?"

Severus' voice broke through Harry's misery, and he pulled free of Severus' embrace to look at Hermione. "But you're dead." It was all too much for the boy and, unconscious, he slumped forward.

Severus gently pushed Harry back onto the chaise, and got up.

"What's happening, Papa?" Hermione was a little shook up to think that Harry had thought that she was dead. "Why did Harry think I was dead?"

Severus shook his head. "I don't know."

Just then the clock chimed and Hermione noticed that almost three hours had passed since she left Ravenclaw tower. "Papa, what happened after Harry rescued me from Filch?"

Severus sat down in front of the fire, and explained everything that had happened since Hermione had been brought down to his rooms, except for what he had found in Harry's mind and Dumbledore's use of legilimency on Harry.

"He called you 'father'?" Hermione wanted to be sure before she broke her promise to Harry and told her father about Harry's dreams.

"Yes, but I have no idea why." Severus was completely bemused.

"I may know why." Hermione then explained about Harry's nightmares and her father's part in them.

After Hermione's revelation, Severus decided to tell her about what he had found in Harry's mind. "When I entered Harry's mind, it looked

like a battlefield. After traversing this, I entered a maze, in the middle of which was a rotating sphere. This sphere was stamped with our family emblem.” Severus was surprised at himself. He had started to think of Lupin as ‘Harry’. On entering the boy’s mind, Severus had almost felt as if he knew Harry well.

“But everyone knows what our family emblem is, Papa. Perhaps the sphere showed that because Harry knew that it was you who was in his mind.” Hermione theorized.

“Yes, but the sphere also had my own personal heir mark on it.” Severus explained.

Hermione gasped. Only heirs and intended heirs knew what form the mark took from generation to generation. There was no way Harry should have known what it was. “But how is that possible?”

Severus shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Hermione gently felt behind her own ear. When her father had finally told her she was his heir, he had explained that the tiny intertwined SS behind her ear wasn’t a scar, but was the mark that identified her as his heir.

Severus watched his daughter touch her mark. “Have you told Harry about your mark?”

“Of course not.” Hermione responded.

Harry moaned, and Hermione moved to sit by him. She gently stroked his hair, luxuriating in its soft texture. As she did so, Harry turned his head, causing his hair to fall to one side to reveal his ear. Severus knew it couldn’t be possible but he still wanted to check something.

“Hermione, this is going to sound ridiculous but could you please look behind Harry’s ear.” After seeing the sphere, Severus had to know whether Harry carried the mark.

Hermione gently lifted Harry's ear so that she could look behind it. "I don't believe it." Hermione staggered back from the sofa. "Papa, he's got the same mark. How could that be?"

"I have no idea. It should only be possible for one heir to be marked."

A horrible thought then struck Hermione. "Harry's not my brother is he?"

"How could he be? Harry is Lupin's son." As soon as the words left Severus' mouth, he realized that Harry couldn't be Lupin's true son; werewolves could only bear daughters. "Is Harry adopted, Hermione?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes, he is. Harry said that he doesn't know who his real parents are."

"Oh Merlin." Severus sat down heavily. Could Harry be his son? It wasn't as if he had he lived the life of a priest before he met Virginie. Like many wizards, he had had quite a few sexual liaisons. Had Harry been the result of one of these?

"Papa, are you okay?" Hermione was worried; her father's usual olive complexion had turned pale.

"Does Harry know anything at all about his parents?" Severus hoped that Hermione would be able to shed some light on Harry's heritage.

Hermione thought about what Harry had told her. "He did say that he thought he might be his adoptive mother's nephew. He said that he found a picture of his adoptive mother with another girl in the frame that said 'sisters'. He believed that the other girl in the picture might be his birth mother."

"Why would he think that?" Severus asked.

"She had the same eye color as he did." Hermione explained.

"Lots of people have blue eyes." Severus thought that Harry had been grasping at straws.

Hermione shook her head from side to side. "Harry's eyes aren't blue; they're green. He wears contact lenses."

At that moment Harry sat up. "Professor Snape, what happened?"

"Do you remember anything after I entered your mind?" Severus wanted to know.

"No, I remember a little pressure and relaxing to let you in, then nothing until now." Harry told his teacher.

Severus looked at his daughter to warn her to say nothing. "Harry, do you remember your birth parents?"

Harry was unsure as to why Professor Snape wanted to know about his birth parents, but answered him anyway. "No, Sir."

"What is your mother's name?" Severus wanted to find out if he knew her.

"Petunia." Harry responded.

"What was her surname before she married your father?" Severus wanted to know.

"Dursley. She was married to Dudley's dad before she got married to my Dad." Harry told him.

Now that Severus knew Harry's adoptive mother's name, he had a uneasy feeling that he knew who Harry's birth mother had been. "Hermione has told me about your contact lenses. Do you mind if I take a look at your eyes without them?"

"Of course not." Harry popped one of his lenses out of his eye, and looked at his professor. He then put it back in.

Severus got up and walked over to his cabinet. Placing his wand into a small hole, a drawer slid open. Severus took a picture out of the

drawer and walked over to Harry with it. Hermione watched, curious as to whose picture her father had kept secreted away.

"This is the girl who was in the picture with my Mum." Harry was shocked. Why would Professor Snape have a picture of his aunt?

"That's Lily Evans. She was my best friend when we were at school." Severus told Harry. "Hermione told me of your suspicions. I think you may be right and that she may be your mother."

Harry touched the photo again, watching the girl in it smile and wave. "Are you still friends?"

"Not exactly, although we still remain in contact." Severus turned to his daughter. "Hermione, would you mind leaving Harry and me alone? I have some personal things I need to discuss with him."

"I don't mind if she stays." Harry said.

Hermione smiled gratefully at Harry.

"You may remain if you wish." Severus told his daughter. He then began to tell Harry about the woman he believed could be Harry's mother. "Lily and I were best friends until our fifth year. There was an incident with James Potter, Jamie Potter's father, and a boy called Sirius Black. Lily defended me, but my pride got in the way and I was very rude to her. We tried to reconcile but another issue got in the way, and she stopped speaking to me."

"What happened?" Harry asked.

"I'd prefer not to go into details." Severus still felt uncomfortable when he thought about how he had denigrated Lily's bloodlines. He also didn't want to admit that he had been deeply immersed in the Dark Arts. "Anyway, Lily had been dating Remus Lupin up until the incident but she suddenly dropped him and started dating James Potter. After she left school, she became engaged to Potter. I never did find out why she dumped Lupin; they'd been dating for almost a year when she ditched him."

Harry was surprised to learn that his Dad had dated his suspected birth mother.

“Just over a year after we left school, Lily turned up at my door, crying. She and James had had a huge fight, and he had called the engagement off. I invited her in and let’s just say that things went a little too far. When I woke up the next day she had gone.”

“You slept with her?” Harry asked incredulously.

“Yes. A few weeks later she and James Potter got married. A short time after that I heard she was pregnant. I went to see her thinking that the baby might be mine. She told me that the babies weren’t mine and that she had slept with James on her return home, after we had spent the night together. I said that I would return once the babies were born; I wasn’t sure that she was telling the truth about the babies’ parentage.”

Hermione interrupted her father. “So it’s true that the Boy Who Lived had a twin?”

Severus nodded his head. “I’ll explain in a while. The Potters went into hiding before their children were born and no-one knew where they were until the night Voldemort attacked. Lily and her son, Jamie, were the only survivors. No mention was made of another baby. I just presumed that she had been wrong when she had told me she was expecting twins or, as the rumors intimated, the other baby had died.”

“What did you do then?” Harry wanted to know.

“Lily was in a coma for a while but once she had recovered, I went to see her in the hospital to demand a paternity test. I wanted to make sure that Jamie Potter wasn’t mine, and to find out what had happened to the other baby; to see if it had really existed or whether it had died in the attack.”

“Did she let you do the test?” Hermione asked her father.

"She did. Jamie Potter is not my son. She also told me that her other son, Harry, died in the attack." Severus looked at Harry why he was talking. "But I now believe that you might be her son, Harry.

Harry was shocked. "How can that be? Lily said Jamie's twin died."

"When I entered your mind I found a sphere; it was marked with the symbol for the Snape heir. Only my heir and myself should know what that symbol is. Hermione checked behind your ear. You carry the same symbol. Your true eye color is identical to Lily's. It is because of these two things that I believe you are our son. I don't know why Lily would have thought that you were dead though." Severus explained his reasoning.

It was all very unsettling. Harry reached up and touched the mark behind his ear. His Mum had said it was a birthmark. "I thought this was just a birthmark. Even with the mark, if I'm Potter's twin, how can I be your son, if Potter is definitely not your child?"

To become a potions master, Severus had had to be knowledgeable about human physiology, and related medical matters. "If you are Lily's son, then you are not an identical twin and, although rare, it is possible for fraternal twins to have different fathers."

Harry was shaken. "How can I find out if Lily Evans is my mother?"

"We can't without getting blood from her." Severus explained. "However, we can check to see if you are my son."

Hermione listened carefully as her father explained to Harry how the paternity test would work.

"So you just put a few drops of blood from both of us into the potion and if it turns green, then you are my father?" Harry wanted Severus to clarify his explanation.

"That is correct. If you will stay here, I will prepare the potion now. It is a simple potion and should only take a short time to prepare." Severus got up and walked quickly out of his rooms.

The two children sat in silence for some time, thinking about the ramifications of Severus' confession.

Eventually Harry turned to Hermione. "I'm not sure if I want to know. If I am your father's son, then how could Lily think that I'm dead? Why haven't my Mum and Dad told me what happened?"

"I don't know but I think its best that you find out first whether Papa is your father." Hermione told Harry, not wanting him to back out of the test. She needed to know if she was in love with her father's son. Changing the subject Hermione asked about Luna. "When did you and Luna get together?"

"We're not." Harry told her.

"But I saw you kissing her, and you went outside together." Hermione protested.

"She kissed me, and I took her outside to tell her that I didn't feel like that about her." Harry explained.

"Why not?" Hermione persisted.

"Because I like someone else." Harry blurted the words out. He hadn't meant to tell Hermione but the words had just slipped out.

Hermione wondered if it might be her. "And who might that be?"

Harry wasn't about to open up about who he liked. "Someone I can't have; she's already spoken for." Harry watched Hermione's face fall. He wanted to tell her; he really did, but he wasn't ready for the repercussions his confession might bring.

"That's okay, Harry. I totally understand." Hermione didn't want to push. "After all, you didn't pester me to tell you when I told you I liked someone."

"I know. I was surprised to find it out was Neville. You could have told me you know." Harry didn't meet Hermione's eyes as he spoke.

"It isn't Neville." Hermione admitted.

"But you've not refused his proposal." Harry was surprised.

"I don't know if the person I like will ever return my feelings, and I don't know if my feelings for Neville might change." Hermione pointed out, looking downcast. "I didn't want to refuse his proposal and then realize that my feelings have changed towards him."

Seeing Hermione's disconsolate look, Harry immediately regretted upsetting her. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said anything." Harry grabbed Hermione's hand, and pulled her closer to him so that he could comfort her.

Pulled tightly against Harry's body, Hermione just stared at Harry. His face was now so close to her own that she saw each individual eyelash. Unable to help herself she looked at his lips, and wondered what it would be like to be kissed by him. Unnerved by her own thoughts, she dropped her eyes from Harry's face to look down at their intertwined hands. "Harry, I..."

The door opening signaled Severus' return; Hermione hurriedly pulled away from Harry, and moved to the other side of the room.

For a moment, Harry had thought that Hermione had been about to kiss him. He quickly dismissed the idea; he knew that Hermione didn't think of him that way. Still, he considered what might have happened if her father hadn't come back when he did.

"It's ready." Severus announced. "Harry, I need a few drops of your blood for the potion." Severus held out a small sharp knife to Harry who, after taking a deep breath, pricked his finger and watched as the blood dripped into the potion. When he had collected enough blood, Severus pulled the tube away and, imitating Harry's actions, pricked his own finger, dropping several drops of his own blood into the tube.

All three watched as the potion changed color.

Next chapter to follow in a few days.

Chapter 19: Questions and Answers

Hermione, Harry and Severus watched as the potion changed to a deep blue.

Severus turned to his daughter. "Hermione, I think it best if you retire now; I have some things I need to discuss privately with Harry."

Hermione looked at Harry who just nodded at her. She knew he would fill her in on anything important.

"Goodnight Papa." Hermione hugged her father.

"We'll talk about Filch in the morning." Severus told her.

Hermione then crossed the room to Harry and hugged him as well. "Goodnight Harry." Hermione placed a swift kiss on Harry's cheek before leaving the pair alone.

Severus watched as Harry blushed at Hermione's kiss. Severus waited until Hermione had closed her door, before setting up silencing spells on the door.

Severus turned to Harry. "Would you like a butterbeer, Harry?"

Harry had never seen his professor act this nicely before; well, not to him anyway. "Yes, please." He just wished the man would tell him what the potion meant.

Severus passed Harry a butterbeer and poured himself a firewhiskey. "As you may have guessed, the test revealed that you are not my son by birth. However, it did show that you are my son by adoption, but in name only."

Harry went white. "But I don't see how that can be. Remus adopted me when I was really small."

"I have no recollection of ever adopting you." Severus himself was at a loss to explain the results. "However, before we continue our

discussion about your parentage, I need to ask you something, and I would appreciate an honest answer.”

“What is it?” Harry asked.

“Do you have feelings for my daughter?” Severus watched as the boy reddened under his gaze.

“She’s my best friend.” Harry told him.

“Nothing more?” Severus persevered with his line of questioning.

“I don’t know. I really like her as a friend but I’m not sure if it’s anything more than that. I kind of like someone else.” Harry was now looking at his feet as if they were the most interesting thing in the world.

“Who?” Severus inquired.

“Cho Chang.” Harry blushed as he spoke. He couldn’t believe he’d actually told his Professor.

“Isn’t she Potter’s girlfriend?” Severus wouldn’t admit to it, but he generally kept abreast of school gossip.

“Yes, but I still like her.” Harry’s face was now a fiery red.

“What you are going to do about it?” Severus was slightly amused by the boy’s discomfort.

“I don’t know.” Harry actually felt a little relieved to be able to tell someone, even if it was Hermione’s dad.

Severus realized that Harry was probably feeling a little embarrassed, and brought the subject to an end. “I think you have enough to deal with at the moment. I would therefore suggest that you forget about both girls as neither is available, and try to concentrate on your studies and quidditch.”

"Yes, Sir." Harry sounded a little disconsolate. "Can I ask you a question now?"

"If it is not too personal, then yes." Severus wasn't going to let Harry take the same liberties he himself had just taken.

Harry took a mouthful of his butterbeer before posing his question. "If I am adopted in name only, can it be undone?"

"You wish me to reverse the adoption?" Severus knew that despite Harry's assertions that Hermione was just a friend, if Harry's feelings changed in the future, the boy would not be able to date his daughter while he was still adopted by Severus.

Harry had entirely different reasoning behind his request. "I do. Remus is my Dad, not you. I'd feel bad about letting things stay as they are."

Severus understood completely; as much as he was beginning to like Harry, he didn't consider the boy his son. "It is a simple procedure. We will both make a small cut on our hands and touch our palms together, and I will then terminate the adoption."

Even though he was a little scared about cutting his hand, Harry nodded as he spoke. "Let's do it then."

Severus held out his left hand. "You will need to touch this ring."

Harry made contact with the ring as Severus uttered "Portus". Harry felt as if someone had placed a hook behind his navel and tugged hard. The next thing he knew he was sitting on the floor of what appeared to be a study, with Severus standing over him.

"This is the Snape family home. I wish to conduct the severance here." Severus enlightened Harry as to why he had been whisked away from Hogwarts.

Severus walked towards a large cupboard and withdrew an ornate dagger. "This is the Snape family ceremonial dagger. It is with this that we will be severing the adoption bond."

Severus then withdrew a vial from the same cupboard and poured its contents over the blade. "This is just a cleansing agent."

Harry hadn't thought about the blade being dirty. "What happens now?"

"Hold out your right hand." Severus told the anxious looking boy.

Harry gingerly held out of his right hand, palm side up. Before Harry could do anything, Severus grabbed his hand and swiftly drew the sharp blade across Harry's palm. At first Harry couldn't feel anything, then a sharp stinging pain began to set in.

"Sorry, but it is better done quickly." Severus held up his own hand and sliced across it without flinching. "Place your palm again mine."

Harry lifted up his hand, wanting nothing more than the stinging pain to stop.

"Abrumpo Inuctio Familia Snape." A dark blue ribbon appeared around the pair's hands and then dissolved.

"Is it done?" Harry wanted to know.

"Yes. However, I have another vial of the Familia potion in my pocket so that we can be certain that the ritual worked." Severus produced the requisite vial. "If you would hold up your hand again."

Harry lifted his still bloody hand and watched as several drops of blood ran down his palm and into the potion. Severus did the same.

While they waited for the potion to change color, Severus healed both his and Harry's cuts.

The potion had turned white, and Severus filled Harry in on its significance. "If the potion turns white it means that the donors have no familial link at all."

"Thank you Professor." Harry felt relieved.

Severus stepped towards Harry. "Do you mind if I check behind your ear?"

"Not at all." Harry tilted his head and moved his ear so that his teacher could easily see if there was anything there.

"The mark's still there!" Severus was surprised.

"Perhaps it's just a birthmark then, like my Mum said." Harry surmised.

"Perhaps. But there is a way to find out." Severus told Harry. "Look at my hands and tell me what you see."

Harry looked down at Severus' hands. His fingers were long and tapered, his nails cut short. "You have the silver ring I touched just now on your left hand, and on your right hand you have a large ring with two intertwined Ss."

"You are still somehow connected to me. Only my heir and I should be able to see that ring. Even my wife is not able to detect its presence." Severus told a mystified Harry. "I can't explain it. You are no longer related to me in any way, so the mark should have vanished. It must have something to do with the sphere I saw in your mind."

"What sphere?" Harry hadn't known anything about a sphere.

Severus related his trip into Harry's mind to the boy. "When I entered your mind, I found a battlefield covered with bodies. After leaving this field, I encountered a maze, at the center of which was a spinning sphere. On the sphere were my family emblem and the heir mark. I was so surprised to find something so personal in someone else's mind that I accidentally lost contact with you."

"Your description sounds like the battlefield in my nightmares, except I can't remember anything about a maze and a sphere." Harry told his professor.

Severus continued. "After leaving your mind, once I became aware of my surroundings, I realized that you were screaming. I managed to calm you down and you eventually woke up. When you did, you threw yourself onto me calling me 'father'. Eventually you passed out." Severus omitted any mention of Harry's claim that Hermione should have been dead.

Harry was silent.

"I know all about your nightmares and what you see in them; Hermione explained them to me after you passed out again." Severus informed Harry.

Harry hadn't really wanted his professor to ever find out about his nightmares but he felt strangely reassured that he knew the truth about them.

"I believe that whatever is happening to you has something to do with that sphere. I think we should meet once a week, and, if you will let me, I would like to re-enter your mind to try to find out what is happening. We can use the two weeks detention that Dumbledore has assigned you with me to cover what we are doing. I will tell him that I don't wish to see you continuously every night for two weeks; hence the division over time." Severus laid out his plan to the still silent boy.

A few minutes passed as Harry thought about Severus' proposal. "So we're not going to tell Dumbledore what we are doing?"

"We are not." Severus confirmed.

"Good." Harry was glad of this; he didn't know why but he felt that he could no longer trust the headmaster. "I don't want anyone else to know what is going on either."

"I swear that I will reveal nothing that goes on between us in my rooms to Dumbledore or anyone else without your agreement." Severus promised.

“Thank you. I had better be getting back to school now, Sir.” Harry felt exhausted.

“I want you to stay in my rooms tonight.” Severus wanted to make sure that Harry was okay after everything that had happened.

“Okay.” Harry just wanted to get back to school and go to sleep.

“Touch my ring again.” Severus instructed the boy, watching as Harry lifted up his hand to touch his own. “Portus.”

Moments later they were both back in Hogwarts; Harry once again failing to remain upright. Severus pulled the boy to his feet and led the way to one of the doors off the sitting room, and opened it. The door led into a room containing a massive bed with dark green canopies and an armoire in one corner. Another door in the opposite corner led to a private bathroom.

Severus’ voice startled Harry. “If you want to shower before bed, I’ll get Salty to bring you a set of pajamas and some clothes for tomorrow.”

“Thank you, Sir.” Harry shut the door and headed into the bathroom. A huge sunken tub sat in the middle of the room, and a large walk-in shower was situated just beyond that. Harry used the lavatory and then stripped off his clothes and stepped into the shower. Once he’d finished showering, Harry found two large fluffy towels waiting for him on the side of the tub. On entering the bedroom, he spotted his pajamas neatly folded on top of one of the pillows. Quickly he dried himself off, slipped into his pajamas and got into bed. Within minutes, Harry was asleep.

It was only the next morning as he got dressed, that he realized that he hadn’t asked the Professor about how to get blood from Lily Evans. Not finding anyone in Severus’ sitting room, Harry made his way up to breakfast. His attention was diverted from his breakfast, however, when he noticed Argus Filch entering the Great Hall.

Dumbledore stood up. “Last night there was a serious incident, and sadly Mr. Filch’s cat was killed. This is the second incident now

involving the death of an animal in this school. If anyone knows of anything that may shed some light on these matters, I should be grateful if you would please tell your head of house. All discussions will be kept confidential."

Murmurs could be heard throughout the Great Hall. For most of the students, it was no great loss that Mrs. Norris had been dispatched; it would make sneaking out at night a lot easier.

Dumbledore continued. "Unfortunately, Mr. Filch attacked a student last night in the mistaken belief that she was to blame for Mrs. Norris' death. It has since been proven beyond a doubt that she was not. Therefore Mr. Filch has agreed to apologize publicly to the student. Miss Snape, would you please stand?"

The entire school turned to watch as Hermione got up from her seat and walked around the Slytherin table, and then up to the head table. She had decided that she would face Filch as he made his apology, rather than cowering behind the Slytherin table.

Filch watched as the girl approached him. He hadn't wanted to make the apology. It was only his unswerving loyalty to Dumbledore, who had assured him that he couldn't cope without Filch's eyes and ears around the school, which had made him bite his tongue and agree to demean himself in this manner.

Hermione stopped in front of the odious man, her stomach churning.

"Miss Snape, I apologize for any distress I may have caused you. I truly believed you were responsible for the death of Mrs. Norris. I promise that I will never lay a hand upon your person again." Filch reluctantly made his speech; he and Dumbledore had agreed the exact wording just before breakfast.

Hermione took a deep but imperceptible breath. "I accept your apology and oath." She then turned her back on the man and walked slowly back to the Slytherin table.

"Thank you, Mr. Filch." Dumbledore swiftly turned everyone's attention away from Filch and his misdemeanor with his next

announcement. "As a special treat this year, it has been decided that there will be a Halloween Ball."

The hall became alive with the buzz of excited students.

"All years will be allowed to attend but there will be curfews in effect for years one through three unless you are accompanied by someone in year four or above." Dumbledore sat down, satisfied that his final revelation would be enough to deflect talk away from Filch and onto something more suitable.

Neville looked over to where Hermione was now reseated, talking to Daphne Greengrass. Gathering up his courage, Neville put down his knife and fork, and got up.

Hermione looked up just as Neville started to walk towards her. She already knew what he was going to ask; she had hoped that Harry would have approached her but he was busy talking to his brother.

"Hermione, can I speak to you please?" Neville inquired.

"Of course, Neville. Daphne, I'll be back shortly." Hermione pushed herself away from the table and followed Neville over to the entrance of the Great Hall.

Now Neville looked really nervous. "Umm, I was wondering if you would, umm, like to go to the Halloween Ball with me."

Not wishing to upset him, Hermione knew she didn't have much choice. "Yes, Neville, I would."

Neville's face broke into a large smile. "That's great."

"If you'll excuse me, I need to finish my breakfast." Hermione left Neville and hurried back to her breakfast. She wanted to get back to her room; she had planned to get some homework done, and then to take a walk around the lake.

Neville headed back to the Gryffindor table. All around the Great Hall similar displays were going on as some of the other students asked their choice of partner to attend the Ball with them.

Seamus and Dean looked at Neville as he sat down.

“Did she say yes, then?” Seamus wanted to know.

Neville just smiled and nodded. He picked up his discarded cutlery and started to eat again.

Blaise Zabini watched Neville as he sat back down at the Gryffindor table. He didn't know what Snape saw in him; he thought the boy was a spineless wimp. Deciding that he ought to think about whom he wanted to take to the Ball, Blaise mulled over the girls in his year; Greengrass was turning into a looker but she was too friendly with Snape; Bulstrode was bigger than he was; and Tracey Davis just wasn't his type.

He then looked down the table to where the three first year girls were sitting. Theresa Davis was far too tall for him and he disliked Valerie Baddock. However, their red-headed friend Ginevra Prewett was quite pretty. She had already gained a reputation as someone who didn't care what she had to do or who she upset to get what she wanted. Blaise admired anyone who displayed the same traits as his own mother.

Blaise climbed to his feet and sauntered to the end of the table where the three girls were sitting. Another of the first years, Michael Smithers, was in the process of asking Ginny to attend with him.

“Or, you could go with me.” Blaise interrupted the first year's entreaty.

Ginny looked up at Blaise. He was good looking, rich and a second year. There really wasn't much choice in the matter. “So, Smithers, you want me to go to the ball with you?”

“Please.” The blond haired boy was almost quivering with anticipation.

"I don't think so." Ginny deliberately turned her back on the boy. "Mr. Zabini, I'd be delighted to attend with you."

Blaise smiled and raised Ginny's hand to his lips and lightly brushed his lips over her knuckles. "I'll look forward to it." He then released her hand and just as casually sauntered back to his place at the far end of the table.

Over on the Ravenclaw table, Dudley had been talking to Harry about quidditch. Suddenly he changed the subject entirely. "Do you mind if I ask Luna to the Ball?"

Harry looked puzzled. "Of course not, why should I?"

"Well, it was only last night when she kissed you." Dudley pointed out.

To Harry, last night seemed almost an eternity ago.

Turning to Dudley, Harry gave his brother a gentle push. "Go ask her. I really don't mind."

Dudley got up and Harry turned his thoughts to the most pressing matter on his mind; just who was he going to take to the Halloween Ball? He had watched Neville go over to Hermione so he knew that Neville had already asked her to go with him, and judging from the happy smile on the boy's face, she had said yes. Luna was out of the question, and so was Cho Chang. Harry decided he would think about it, and settled down to finish his breakfast.

Filius listened to Dumbledore's speech about the dead cat and Filch's subsequent apology to Hermione Snape. He decided that he would take a walk down to Hogsmeade after breakfast had finished. Soon Filius was entering the Three Broomsticks. After paying the requisite fee, Filius stepped into the pub's fireplace and disappeared.

At the Ministry of Magic a tall blond man stepped out of the incoming fireplace. He flashed a badge at the wizard sitting at the wand weighing desk, who just waved him through without bothering to examine his wand. The man headed through the golden gates and into an elevator. A few minutes later he opened a door on the ninth

floor marked 'Requisitions', and stepped into the office the door had been concealing.

The office was fairly small; it had a desk, five cabinets and a couple of chairs in it. At the rear of the office was a small ornate fireplace. The man pulled out the chair that was under the desk and sat down. On top of the desk sat a basket with his post in it. Quickly skimming through the post, he picked out a brightly colored postcard, and smiled to himself while reading it.

'Dear Simultas

I hope this card finds you well. I am currently staying with friends. They have the most fantastic vineyard, so I am doing rather well. We are going to be making a trip to the mountains soon. I wish you could be here with me; there are so many nice young ladies here. I'm sure you would enjoy yourself.

Give my best wishes to your parents.

I'll be in touch.

Peter Parvulus'

The man smiled. The postcard was from the real Filius Flitwick who was currently touring North America. In order to monitor Dumbledore's activities, the real Flitwick had been approached by the head of his division just over eight years ago. At first Flitwick had taken some persuading but, after being shown irrefutable evidence, he had eventually agreed to let someone take his place at Hogwarts. Up until the previous year, the small professor had been teaching under an alias in Salem but a change of headmistress had meant that it was no longer safe for him to stay there. The new headmistress, Elena Baev, was a known friend of Dumbledore's.

The blond man then spent several hours sorting through the remainder of his post, before he got up, stretched and stepped into the fireplace. Throwing floo powder at his feet, he called out "Meus Familia Flamel", and disappeared in a flash of green smoke and

flames. Moments later he found himself in Nicolas Flamel's private study.

Nicolas watched as a blond man stepped out of the fireplace. Seconds later, his wife flew into the study, alerted by the wards that someone had flooded directly into Nic's office.

As the man transformed from blond into his dark haired natural state, Peri dashed up to him and pulled him into her arms. "My little Leo. It feels as though it has been forever since we last saw you. How have you been? Are you eating enough? Can you stay for dinner?"

Leo laughed; his mother hated his real first name and always called him by her pet name for him. "I know. I'm fine. I am. I can't." His mother was sometimes a little intense in her affection for him but he thought the world of her.

"Let me hug my son." Nicolas gently untangled his wife from Leo and pulled the man into his own arms. "Do you have something to report?"

Getting down to business, Leo let go of his father and sat down. "I'm afraid so. Last night Filch's cat was found dead. Filch attacked Severus Snape's daughter, thinking she was to blame. Another pupil, Harry Lupin, then attacked both Filch and Madam Pince, in defense of Miss Snape. The upshot of that is that Mr. Lupin has been assigned two weeks' worth of detentions with Severus. The most disturbing thing of all though, is that whoever killed the cat claims that the Chamber of the Secrets has been reopened."

Nicolas looked worried. "I remember when it was opened previously; a girl died that time."

Leo hadn't been aware of that. He knew that Filius would probably have known. "Obviously I have a few gaps in my education."

"I'll arrange for the file to be on your desk for your return." Nicolas got up and left the room.

Peri looked at her son. "I wish you'd stop working undercover. How are you ever supposed to meet a nice girl that way?" She was desperate for grandchildren.

"I have met a nice girl, only I doubt very much that she is interested in a tiny wizened old professor like Filius. She's the new muggle studies teacher. She has the most remarkable eyes. However, I don't think she'd be interested in me even if I did reveal my true image. I think she is rather taken with Severus." Leo liked Anna well enough but he wasn't really attracted to her.

"I thought Severus was married." Peri didn't approve of extramarital affairs.

"He is. He'd never look at another woman, and who could blame him. His wife is absolutely stunning." Leo sounded a little regretful.

"Don't tell me you like Severus' wife?" Peri asked her son.

Leo shook his head. "She may be beautiful but she's a little too high maintenance for the likes of me." He laughed and hugged his mother. "I want to meet someone who will look at me in the same way you look at Dad."

His mother smiled mistily. Even after hundreds of years, she was still as in love with Nic as she had always been. She looked at her son proudly. She'd given up on ever having children until she'd found Leo. He'd been deprived of motherly love growing up, and in him Peri had found a child to lavish her maternal affection on. Both had benefited from the association and were extremely close.

Nic disturbed the pair's reverie. "I've arranged for the file to be delivered to your desk. Are you sure you can't stay for lunch?"

Leo looked at his mother's pleading face. "Well, maybe for a little while."

Arm in arm, the trio left the room and headed for the dining room.

Back at Hogwarts Harry hurried to get to the library. He'd agreed to meet the rest of the Outcasts to go over their herbology homework. When he arrived, the only person there was Pansy Parkinson, who looked as if she had been crying.

Harry marched up to her. "Pansy, what's up?"

"It's Draco. He was here earlier; he'd fallen asleep. He didn't look as if he had been sleeping well, so I didn't wake him. I was reading my book when he suddenly started screaming and woke up. I asked him if he was alright, and he told me to mind my own business and to leave him alone. Harry, he pushed me over to get past me. That's not like Draco at all." Pansy then burst into tears.

Harry was beginning to wonder if he was a magnet for crying girls; lately that was all they ever seemed to do around him.

Harry then told Pansy about the previous night. "It's strange that you should mention that Draco is not behaving like himself. He actually talked to me last night. I found him wandering around; he'd said he'd hit his head. He looked totally lost. He even let me walk him back to Ravenclaw Tower"

Intrigued, Pansy stop crying. "You're right. That doesn't sound like Draco. He's only been like this since he got that damn diary of his. All he ever does is write in it; I'm surprised it's not full. The weird thing is that he always seems to be writing on the same page." Pansy complained to Harry.

"Ooh, perhaps it's a magic diary." Harry teased Pansy trying to get her to smile.

"Harry, you are not funny." Pansy laughed anyway. "Sorry for crying all over you."

"It's okay." Harry smiled sweetly at the girl.

Pansy looked at Harry. Even though he didn't know it, Harry was a favorite among the Ravenclaw girls. He was always the first boy to stand up if one of them needed somewhere to sit, and he would

always stop to help someone if they got into difficulties with their schoolwork. It also didn't hurt that he had a really cute smile. Even Cho, who was dating the Boy Who Lived, professed to having a crush on the boy.

Lost in thought, Pansy didn't realize that she was still staring at Harry, who touched his face inquiringly. "Is there something on my nose?"

Pansy shook her head, and decided to change the subject to the main topic of everyone's conversation that day. "So, Harry, who are you taking to the Halloween Ball?"

"No-one. How about you?" Harry half expected Pansy to say Draco, despite their recent differences.

"Same as you." Pansy shrugged; she'd decided that she wasn't really that bothered if she went to the ball or not.

Harry thought about it for a moment. He liked Pansy well enough, and he knew Hermione and Cho were out of the question. "Would you like to go with me?"

Pansy just about stopped herself from squealing in delight. "I'd love to. I'm just going to return this defense book, and I'll be back."

Harry watched as Pansy disappeared around the stacks. Perhaps Professor Snape had been right. It was time to cut his losses and forget about both Hermione and Cho.

Behind the stacks Pansy did a little victory dance. She couldn't believe that Harry Lupin was going to go to the ball with her.

24th October 1992

Remus was walking through London back to his apartment. Normally he just apparated but the day had been unseasonably warm and Remus had decided to take advantage of the late afternoon sunshine. Suddenly he found himself in front of a house he'd never been in but knew quite well from his time as one of Dumbledore's surveillance team. It was the London home of the Boy Who Lived, Lily's house.

Remus had imagined many times walking up these very steps and confronting the woman who'd given up her son. Remus still couldn't understand how Lily could have given Harry up. Deciding it was time he found out, Remus moved smartly up the steps and knocked on the door. He was surprised to see Lily herself open it.

"Remus Lupin. I haven't seen you since Jamie was small. Come in." Lily beamed happily at the man she hadn't seen for over eleven years.

Remus stepped over the threshold and followed Lily down a narrow hallway. At the end of the hallway was a dining room which opened into the kitchen. On the far wall was a large pin board which was covered in children's drawings.

"Where is everyone?" Remus had expected to find Lily's children here.

"The boys have gone to a quidditch match, and Narcissa has taken Cassie and Anna to the Enchanted Spa. It's Anna's birthday today, so I opted to stay behind and cook dinner." Lily explained.

Remus knew that Lily was an excellent cook, and from the smells emanating from the kitchen, it appeared that nothing had changed there.

"Can I get you something to drink?" Lily waved her hand towards the drinks cabinet.

"A red wine if you have it." Remus told her.

Lily picked up an open bottle of merlot and poured two glasses of it, passing one to Remus and taking the other herself. "Please sit down."

Remus sat down and took a mouthful of wine. "This is really good."

"It's from Sirius' cellar. He said that it would go well with dinner. I've also got another couple of bottles that Craig picked out, but between you and me, Sirius has much better taste in wine than Craig so that's the one we're drinking." Lily babbled to the man across from her.

It was at that moment that Remus realized that Lily was nervous. "Lily, relax. I don't bite."

Lily laughed. They both knew very well that that wasn't quite true. "You haven't changed much."

"I'd like to think I have. You have." Remus took a swig of his wine and put down the glass. "The Lily I knew would never have given up on her son."

"What do you mean?" Lily asked.

"Harry. I mean Harry. How could you just give up on your son like that?" Remus could feel himself getting angry. He hadn't meant to bring up the subject in the way he had, but the opening had been too good to miss.

"I never once gave up on Harry. You weren't there. You didn't have to face Voldemort; I did everything I could." Lily was now on feet facing the man in front of her.

"You didn't do enough. Harry should have grown up here, with his brothers and sisters. His pictures should have been on that board." Remus was now also standing, his finger pointed in the direction of the pin board.

Lily was furious. "Get out of my home. You can't come in here and tell me that I didn't do enough for my son. Get out."

Remus walked past Lily and stopped to look directly into her eyes. "I feel sorry for you. You'll never know what you've missed."

"Don't you think I don't know that?" Lily drew her wand. "You've said your piece. It's just sad that it's taken you this long to do it. Now just go and don't ever come back."

Lily watched as Remus pulled open the front door and slammed it behind him. As soon as he left she collapsed onto the floor and began to weep. She couldn't believe that he had had the audacity to accuse her of failing her son. After a few minutes she pulled herself

together and climbed to her feet. Spotting Remus' wine glass on the table she threw it across the room, feeling satisfied as it smashed into thousands of tiny pieces, droplets of red wine staining all that it touched.

Lily picked up her own glass and took a mouthful of the wine. Putting down the glass, she felt around her neck and pulled out the locket she always wore. Opening it, she stroked the piece of hair it held; opposite was a baby picture. She remembered the horror of waking up in St. Mungo's just over two months after Voldemort's attack.

7th January 1982

Lily groaned. Her head hurt.

"Mrs. Potter, can you hear me?" A voice penetrated through the fog that shrouded Lily's mind.

Slowly Lily opened her eyes. "Wha..." Her voice cracked.

A glass of water was gently lifted to her lips and Lily sipped from it gratefully. "What happened?"

The nurse who had given her the water put the glass back down on the bedside table. "Someone will be along in a moment."

After a few minutes, Albus Dumbledore entered the room.

"Albus, what happened? Where are my babies? Is James okay?" Lily started to cough.

Albus gently lifted her head and gave her some more water. "Just lie back for a moment, Lily."

Lily knew something was wrong. "Just tell me, please."

"I'm so sorry, Lily. James and Harry didn't make it." Albus held Lily's hand as he told her.

“No, God, no. Not my baby, not James.” Lily started to cry; huge sobs wracking her body.

Albus gathered the frail looking woman into his arms and gently rocked her. “I really am sorry. James died protecting you all. I believe Harry was killed by Voldemort himself.”

Lily continued to cry and a healer came running into the room with a sedative in his hand. “Please drink this, Mrs. Potter.”

Lily shook her head and pushed the potion away from her. “What about Jamie?”

“He’s fine. I’ll arrange for him to be brought into you later.” Dumbledore told her.

“I want to see him now.” Lily needed to see her son.

Albus nodded at the doctor who left the room. When he returned, he held a small sleeping toddler.

“Jamie.” Lily tried to sit up. Albus leant over and helped her up.

As her son was laid in her arms, Lily started to cry once more. She couldn’t believe that she would never see Harry or James again.

“I took a lock of hair from Harry; I thought you might like to have it.” Albus handed over a locket; in it was a baby picture of Harry and a tiny lock of soft black hair.

“Thank you. I want to be alone with my son now.” Lily looked at Albus who reluctantly nodded and left the room.

“I’m sorry, Mrs. Potter, but I can’t leave you alone. I’ll ask Nurse Diaz to return.” The doctor looked apologetically at Lily.

“That’s fine.” Lily then ignored everything and focused all her attention on her son.

Present time

Albus had been very supportive of her in the hospital. He had encouraged her to focus all of her attention on Jamie; telling her that the world would be looking to her son as their savior. At first things had gone well, and Albus had treated Jamie like a grandson. However, things had changed when she had gotten remarried. Albus didn't really like her husband that much and his visits had placed a strain on Lily and Albus' relationship to the point of breaking. Eventually it had become too much and the two had parted acrimoniously, with Albus accusing Lily of neglecting her son in favor of her husband. She had told Albus that he should not come back until he was ready to apologize. She hadn't seen him since. When Jamie had been hurt the previous year, she had sent Craig to get him, unable to face the man again.

Lily looked at the time and wiped her face. Everyone would be home soon, and she didn't want to spoil her daughter's birthday by crying over Harry. Taking a final mouthful of wine, Lily repaired the shattered wine glass and fixed the damage it had done, before heading into the kitchen to finish dinner.

Remus stomped angrily up the street and away from Lily's house. He should have known better. Deciding that he needed to see his own family, Remus found a quiet spot and apparated into the sitting room of Darcy Cottage. The sight that met his eyes didn't exactly cheer him up.

His wife was seated by the fireplace with Scarlett Rose on her lap. Aurilia and Georgiana were lounging on either arm of the opposite chair, a strange man seated in between them.

"Daddy" Scarlett Rose jumped up off her mother's lap and threw herself into her father's arms. The twins also jumped up and wrapped themselves around their father.

"Poppet." Remus swung Scarlett around and then gently placed her on the ground. The twins were both subjected to the same treatment, Aurilia squealing for more before Remus lowered her to the ground. He then walked towards the stranger who had gotten up.

Holding his hand out, Remus introduced himself. "Remus Lupin."

"Grimstock Lovegood. I'm pleased to meet you at last. Your wife and daughters have told me so much about you." Grimstock firmly shook Remus' hand.

Nia got up. "Remus, you should have told me you were coming. I'll go and lay another place at the table. We were just going to have dinner."

Remus shook his head. "I just popped back to get a few things. I'm going to have a scotch in my study. Would you care to join me?" Remus directed his last two comments to Grimstock Lovegood.

"I'll never turn down a good scotch." Grimstock beamed happily at Remus and followed him into his study.

Remus poured out two large scotches. "Ice?"

"No thank you." Grimstock took the glass and saluted Remus. "To neighbors."

"Neighbors." Remus echoed the man's toast.

Deciding to take the bull by the horns, Grimstock jumped in before Remus could say anything. "I know how it must look to you, arriving here and I'm all cozy in front of your fireplace."

Remus held up his hand to stop the man. "Mr. Lovegood, I trust my wife. She has been writing to me about everything you have done for her. I'm just sorry that I haven't been able to help more myself. I think I've bitten off more than I can chew with the extra tutoring I've taken on at the school I'm teaching at."

Despite Remus' reassurances, Grimstock knew that the man wasn't entirely happy about his being here. "Your wife and family have been good to me. They've kept me company when I've been lonely. My niece has just started at Hogwarts and I find the house a little depressing now that she's gone."

Remus looked carefully at the man across from him. He had a niggling feeling that he'd seen him somewhere before. "I'm sorry but this is going to sound odd. Have we met before?"

Grimstock shook his head. "I don't recall."

At that moment Aurilia popped her head into the study after knocking. "Daddy, dinner's ready. Are you going to stay?"

"Sorry Auri, but I need to get back. Tell your mom I'll write to her." Remus turned to the man in front of him. "It's been a pleasure."

The two men shook hands, Remus picked up his books, winked at his daughter and apparated out of the study.

Aurilia looked crestfallen. Grimstock went up to the girl and knelt in front of her. "Never mind sweetheart. It'll soon be Christmas and your Dad will be here again."

Aurilia hugged the bear-like man. "Uncle Grim, you'll be here at Christmas won't you?"

"Of course I will. Now let's go and get some of your mother's wonderful cooking." Taking Auri by her hand, Grimstock led the girl out to the dining room.

After the girls had gone to bed, Grimstock and Nia sat by the fireplace, both nursing the last of the wine left over from dinner.

"Are you happy, Nia?" Grimstock asked the woman who sat quietly across from him. "Tell me to mind my own business if you want, but you seemed so sad during dinner."

Nia smiled tremulously. "I miss him when he's not here. That's the first time I've seen him since the start of September. He says he's doing it for the money but we don't really need it."

"Do you want to talk about it?" Grimstock watched as Nia's hands trembled. Grimstock had been surprised when Remus had apparated

out without bothering to say goodbye to his wife and daughters, except for Aurilia.

"I'm sorry, I can't. Not yet." Nia looked apologetically at the man across from her.

"If you ever need anyone to talk to, you know where I am. It's getting late, I'd better head off home. Thanks again for a wonderful meal." Grimstock got up and kissed Nia on the cheek before apparating back to his own home.

Nia banked the fire and headed for bed.

Back in Fable Cottage, Grimstock settled down with a glass of scotch. He didn't really like Remus Lupin, even if the man did have good taste in scotch.

Grimstock hadn't been totally honest with Lupin. He knew where Lupin probably recalled him from. Some years earlier Grimstock had been having lunch with his friend, Macallister Jameson, when his friend had suddenly looked angry. It turned out that the man seated on the other side of the room with a pretty woman was someone Jameson knew. His friend had told him that the guy, Lupin, was married with several children, and that the woman with him hadn't been his wife. He'd forgotten about it until he'd met Lupin tonight. Even though Grimstock sometimes forgot to eat his meals, or drifted off into his own world, he never forgot a face.

Dismissing Lupin from his mind, Grimstock finished off the last of the scotch in his glass and, copying his neighbor, banked his fire and went to bed.

28th October 1992

Half way through the potions lesson, a knock sounded on the door and a timid looking first year came in. "Professor Snape, the Headmaster needs to see you." The first year then scuttled out as quickly as he could.

“Hermione, you will take over the class until I return.” Severus hurried out of the door.

Hermione moved to the front of the class after placing her potion under a stasis spell; something Severus had taught her some years previously.

Looking around she spotted smoke rising from Ron Prewett’s cauldron. “Mr. Prewett, you should check your potion.”

“Don’t order me around.” Ron had backed off from hassling the girl after the previous year but right now he resented the fact that she could tell him what to do in the Professor’s absence.

Hermione walked over to the cauldron. “I really would suggest that you add your powdered fairy wings before your potion solidifies.”

“I know what I’m doing.” Ron ignored Hermione’s instructions and sure enough, the potion solidified. “Stupid know-it-all bitch.”

Hermione had had enough. “I’d watch what you’re saying if I was you Prewett.”

“Why, what are you going to do, Slytherin? Kill me, like you did Filch’s cat?” Ron sneered at the girl.

Angrily Hermione hissed at the boy. “I just might if you push me hard enough, Gryffindor.”

Severus walked through the door. “Is anything wrong, Hermione?”

“No, Sir. Prewett just ruined his potion.” Hermione smirked at Ron and went and sat back down at her desk.

Severus stalked up to Ron’s desk and looked into his cauldron. “Failing grade for today’s lesson, Prewett. Class dismissed.

Hermione decided to wait for her father to accompany her to the Great Hall. She didn’t need the aggravation she knew that Ron was likely to give her if she walked out with everyone else.

“Was Prewett bothering you?” Severus asked his daughter after everyone had left.

“Nothing I couldn’t handle.” Hermione smiled sunnily up at her father as they exited the potions classroom together.

30th October 1992

Harry knocked on Severus’ apartment door.

Hermione opened it. “Harry, come in. Papa is just finishing marking some papers in his study. He said that he will be with you shortly.”

Harry stepped into the sitting room. He was extremely nervous about tonight. He was supposed to have had his ‘detention’ last night but had been unwell, so Severus had rescheduled it until today. Last week’s attempt had been a complete failure resulting in nothing but outsized headaches for both Harry and Severus.

Hermione sat down and expected Harry to do the same. “You can sit down you know.”

Harry gingerly lowered himself in a chair across from his friend. He felt uncomfortable being alone with Hermione; they hadn’t been alone together since the night of Filch’s cat’s death. He still hadn’t told her about what had happened in her father’s home.

Hermione broke the silence. “So I hear that you are going to the Ball with Pansy.”

“Yes. Neither of us had anyone to go with, so we’re going to go together.” Harry responded.

Hermione looked at Harry. “You make it sound as if she was your last resort.”

“She’s not. We were discussing the Ball and I found out that we were both going alone. I really like Pansy, so I decided to ask her to go

with me.” Harry watched as Hermione looked away from him. “Hermione, is everything okay between us?”

Hermione made up an excuse. She had been miserable ever since she had found out that Harry was taking Pansy to the Ball. She felt even worse now that Harry had told her that he really liked the girl. “I’m sorry. I’m just really tired. I’ve been trying to find out everything I can about the Chamber of Secrets, and I haven’t been sleeping well. I’ve looked through every book I can find and have been unable to discover anything.”

Harry grinned. “Nor me. I must have checked out half of the books in the library trying to find something out.”

“So that’s why most of the books I wanted were missing.” Hermione smiled back at Harry.

Harry looked at the table next to Hermione. A box of Monnbeams’ Delights was sitting there, and from the look of things, most of them had been eaten. Harry then turned to look at Hermione, who blushed.

“Neville sent them; I can’t stop eating them. They’re my favorite candies; dark chocolate on the outside and soft buttery caramel on the inside. If I keep this up I won’t fit into my robes tomorrow.” Hermione lamented.

Severus opened the door from his study to find Harry sitting across from his daughter. “Good evening, Mr. Lupin.”

Harry stood up. “Good evening, Professor.”

“If you’ll both excuse me.” Hermione left the room, glad to escape.

“Are you ready to try again?” Severus was feeling tired after reading through some of the worst essays of his career.

“Yes Sir”. Harry sensed that Severus wasn’t in a good mood.

“Come and lie down then. This time please try to relax.” Severus’ tone was slightly acerbic.

Harry lay down and closed his eyes as Severus pulled out his wand. "Legilimens."

In contrast to the last attempt, Severus easily entered Harry's mind. However, instead of finding himself on the battlefield, he found himself in the headmaster's office. In front of him, facing a woman lying on a couch, was a dark haired man who looked vaguely familiar. He couldn't hear what they were saying. Most frustratingly, the scene was without sound.

The man turned around to face Severus. It was all Severus could do to remain focused. He had been right in thinking that the man looked familiar; it was him. However, this version of him looked as if he had been tortured. A reddened puckered scar ran down from the corner of his left eye to the corner of the right side of his mouth, and the socket of his left eye was empty; Severus shuddered. But for Severus, the most horrifying sight was not the lack of an eye or the scar, but the absence of any fingers on his right hand. A potions master needed both hands for the delicate work required in potion making.

Severus had been so busy looking at his mirror image that he entirely missed what was happening elsewhere in the room. One moment he was looking at his alternate self, the next a blinding light threw him out of Harry's mind and back into his own. Thankfully Harry wasn't screaming this time.

"Are you okay Sir?" Harry looked up at his professor.

"Yes. I'm fine. What was that?" Severus appeared to be in shock.

"That was part of my nightmare." Harry explained. This time he had been able to witness what Severus had been seeing.

"Why do I look like that?"

"I don't know. When I first had the dreams you had no face but recently things have begun to get a lot clearer." Harry knew it couldn't have been pleasant for the professor to see himself looking like that.

“I think that will be enough for tonight.” Severus wanted to place the memory in his pensieve and replay it again.

“I’ll head back to the Tower then.” Harry got up to leave.

“No. I’d prefer it if you’d stay here tonight. I may have some questions for you.” Severus walked towards the door of his study. “Salty will bring your clothes down to you.”

In his study Severus placed the memory of Harry’s nightmare into his pensieve. Severus watched it again and again but failed to spot anything of relevance. Frustrated, Severus withdrew. He would need to re-enter Harry’s mind again.

Marching into the sitting room, Severus found Harry asleep on the couch. Obviously the intrusion in his mind had worn the boy out. Gently Severus lifted Harry up and carried him into the green bedroom he had slept in before. A wave of his wand later, and Harry was in his pajamas and tucked into bed. Frowning, Severus left the room. His investigations would have to wait until next week.

The Halloween Ball

Hermione squeezed into her new cream silk robes. She’d been right about eating too many chocolates. Promising herself that she wouldn’t eat any more, she called for Bright who cast a spell on the robes to let them out slightly. Feeling relieved, she thanked the house elf, and headed into the sitting room where her father was waiting for her.

“A house elf brought this for you.” Severus held up a white tea rose corsage for her wrist.

“Don’t tell me, Neville sent it.” Hermione was impressed; the corsage was beautiful.

Severus smirked at his daughter. “Actually it was Harry. Apparently he’s sent one to you, Luna and Pansy.”

“How do you know?” Hermione was amazed at how her father knew these things.

“The elf told me.” Severus smiled and held out his arm. “Shall we?”

Hermione smiled and let her father escort her to the Great Hall where Neville was waiting. Severus just looked at the boy before relinquishing his daughter.

“Shall we go in?” Neville held out his own arm.

The Great Hall had been transformed by the teachers. Pumpkins lit from within floated around the Hall, bats fluttered quietly above the children’s heads, and the cry of the werewolf echoed intermittently throughout the room. Hermione thought it looked quite spooky.

“Where are we sitting?” she asked Neville.

Neville pointed to a table set out for ten people. Hermione looked to where Neville had pointed. Harry was already seated with Pansy to his right. The others on the table included Luna and Dudley; Angelina, George’s partner; and surprisingly Daphne Greengrass, who had come as Fred’s partner.

Hermione sat down next to Daphne and Neville took the space between her and Harry. “Daphne, I didn’t know you were coming with Fred.”

“He asked just after the Ball was announced. Sorry, I forgot to mention it.” Daphne grinned at her friend. She was really pleased to be attending with a fourth year. It meant she could stay up past the ten o’clock curfew that had been imposed on the first to third years.

The table next to Harry’s was set for eight and was occupied by Seamus and Dean with their partners, Su Li and Padma Patil. Tracey Davis was also seated there together with Theo Nott who nodded his head in recognition of Hermione, who smiled in return. Lois Green and Terry Boot rounded out the numbers.

Dumbledore stood up. “Ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Halloween Ball. Dinner will be served momentarily. Just pick up the menu in front of you and state clearly what you want to eat. After dinner, music will be provided for anyone wishing to dance.”

Professor Lockhart stood up and whispered in Dumbledore’s ear.

“Professor Lockhart has asked me to announce that he will be hosting a dueling club starting next month. Details and a sign-up sheet will be posted on the notice-board, and all years are welcome to attend. Now let’s get down to business and tuck-in.” Dumbledore sat down and picked his food choices from the menu in front of him.

All around the Hall voices could be heard ordering their food. Soon the Hall was filled with the sounds of eating and casual chatter.

Back in Ravenclaw Tower, Draco helped himself to the sandwiches and juice that had been laid out for anyone not wishing to attend the Ball. He decided to take his food upstairs and eat it sitting at his desk. On his desk, the diary lay open, beckoning to him while he ate. Draco had tried to ignore it but every day the need to write it in grew stronger.

Putting down his sandwich, Draco picked up his pen.

“Tom. Are you there?”

“I am, Draco. What are you doing?”

“I’ve just eaten dinner in my room. Everyone else is at the Halloween Ball.”

“Why didn’t you go?”

“Because my only friend accepted an invitation to go with someone else.”

“Who?”

“Harry Lupin, the boy I told you about.”

“I’m sorry, Draco. I know how it feels to be rejected.”

“I didn’t want to go anyway.”

“As I said, I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’m going to sleep now. Goodnight Tom.”

“Goodnight Draco.”

Draco closed the diary, and placed it under his pillow. That was the last thing Draco remembered doing until he awoke the next day.

The Ball had been a hit. After dinner had been cleared away, most of the students moved onto the dance floor that had been set up in the middle of the hall.

With so many people gyrating around in an enclosed space, things had soon become a little too warm and, feeling the need for some fresh air, Hermione excused herself. Leaving the Great Hall, she set off for the small walled garden just off the main corridor. Hermione entered the garden and spotted Professor McGonagall’s cat animagus patrolling the herb borders. After a few minutes she felt a little better and decided to head back to the Ball.

On reaching the corridor, Hermione discovered that all the lights had been extinguished. A little frightened, she panicked and, instead of returning to the garden to where she knew Professor McGonagall was patrolling, Hermione bolted towards the Great Hall. Her wand held in her hand, Hermione ran as quickly as she could, only to come to a halt as she tripped over something lying in the corridor. Pulling herself onto her hands and knees Hermione picked up her fallen wand and uttered “Lumos”. She quickly discovered what she had fallen over; it was the body of a student. Moving backwards away from the body, Hermione screamed.

Sorry for the slight cliffie. Next chapter to follow in a day or two.

Following a review I have just received, I would like to point out that Harry is now in no way related to Hermione - why he still carries the Snape heir symbol will be revealed later in the story.

Chapter 20: Duels, Diaries and Deals

Hermione crawled backwards as quickly as she could, only to scream once more as a hand touched her shoulder.

“Miss Snape, are you alright?” The voice of Minerva McGonagall echoed in the dimly lit corridor.

Hermione didn’t say anything and just motioned to the floor behind her.

Minerva waved her wand and the lights in the corridor sprang to life. “Oh, my goodness.”

She could now see what Hermione was pointing at. Minerva flicked her wand through the air, and a silvery tabby cat leapt from the end of it and headed in the direction of the Great Hall.

“Do you know what happened, Miss Snape?” Minerva questioned the white-faced girl.

“No, Professor. I was just coming back from the garden and...” Hermione’s shaky response was interrupted by the arrival of Lavender Brown, who screamed.

“You’ve killed him, you’ve killed Ron.” Lavender burst into tears.

“Professor McGonagall, what is going on?” Dumbledore arrived at the scene, alerted by Minerva’s messenger spell.

Minerva motioned to Ron Prewett, who lay prostrate on the ground.

Dumbledore bent over to examine the boy. “He’s not dead; I believe he’s been petrified.”

Minerva let out a sigh of relief. She didn’t particularly care for Ron, but he was one of her Gryffindors.

The small group standing around Ron’s prone body began to grow by the minute, as word spread that a student had been attacked.

Dumbledore searched the newly gathered crowd. "Ah, Filius, would you be so kind as to take Mr. Prewett up to the hospital wing? Tell Poppy I believe he has been petrified."

Filius immediately cast the mobilicorpus spell on Ron, who rose from the ground. Filius directed the boy's prone body in the direction of the hospital wing, and soon both of them had disappeared from view.

Dumbledore then addressed himself to Minerva. "Professor McGonagall, perhaps we should move this to my office where we can discuss what happened further. Miss Brown and Miss Snape, you will both come with us."

Severus moved forward. "I think it best if I also accompany you."

Dumbledore shook his head. "That won't be necessary, Professor Snape. Professor McGonagall will see both girls back to their dormitories when I have finished speaking to them."

He then turned to the students who were still standing around. "Please return to the Great Hall. One of the teachers will escort you safely back to your houses."

Severus walked up to Hermione and handed over her purse; it had fallen to the floor when she had tripped over Ron.

As the group moved away from the scene of the incident, Hermione made an excuse. "I need to use the bathroom."

"Professor McGonagall, would you please escort Miss Snape to the bathroom." Dumbledore looked suspiciously at Hermione. "Please make sure she leaves her wand with you before entering the bathroom."

"Yes, Headmaster." Minerva gently led Hermione off towards the nearest bathroom.

“I won’t be a moment, Professor.” Hermione went into the bathroom, and once she had finished, rejoined the Professor, who had waited outside for her.

Within a short space of the time, Hermione and Minerva were seated in the Headmaster’s office. Lavender was already there, drinking a cup of hot chocolate and sniffing periodically into a handkerchief. Minerva noticed that the Headmaster failed to extend the same courtesy to Hermione.

“Miss Snape, this is the second time you have been found in the vicinity of a strange occurrence. Perhaps you would care to explain what happened to me.” Dumbledore sat looking at Hermione intently, his fingers steeped in front of him.

Hermione looked Dumbledore directly in the eye. “I had been in the garden getting some fresh air. On my way back to the Great Hall, I found that all the lights had gone out. I was frightened and so I ran as quickly as I could back towards the Hall. I tripped over Prew... err, Ron in the dark. Professor McGonagall came along just after I found him.”

“Professor, is this true?” Dumbledore turned to Minerva.

She nodded her head. “I had been patrolling the garden in my animagus form.” She didn’t tell Dumbledore that she had actually been chasing moths for fun. “I saw Miss Snape come into the garden, and, after a few minutes, she left. As there were no other students in the garden, I decided that I would head back to the Hall; it was almost time for the curfew for the younger children to begin. On entering the corridor, I found that everything was in darkness. I then heard Miss Snape scream and so I ran to where she was kneeling on the ground. After I relit the candles, Miss Snape pointed out Mr. Prewett, who was lying on the floor.”

Minerva finished speaking and the Headmaster thanked her. He then went on to discuss Lavender Brown’s part in the drama.

“Miss Brown has already enlightened me as to her movements this evening, and I am happy that she is telling the truth.” Dumbledore

smiled at the girl in question, who gave a tremulous smile in return. "Miss Snape, Miss Brown also informed me that you threatened Mr. Prewett during a potions lesson."

Hermione bit back her anger at Lavender. "Ron had made a mistake during his potion making, which I pointed out. He called me names, and implied that I had killed Mrs. Norris. I was angry and snapped at him. I didn't really mean anything I said."

Dumbledore, who had been staring intently at Hermione during her earlier explanation, was now wearing a slight frown. "Miss Snape, please try to refrain from threatening your fellow students in future. Ten points from Slytherin for your lack of judgment. Now, while I don't believe that you had anything to do with Mr. Prewett's petrification, I would still like to check your wand."

Professor McGonagall still had Hermione's wand which she handed over to the Headmaster.

Dumbledore then murmured something that Hermione didn't quite catch, and her wand spewed forth the last few spells she had cast before the incident. Before passing her wand back to her, the Headmaster dispelled the ghostly images which lingered in the air.

Albus decided to change tack, and smiled congenially at Hermione. "I am completely satisfied about your lack of involvement this evening. However, if there is anything you know that you think might help, please feel free to come to me."

"Thank you, Sir." Hermione was surprised that the Headmaster had let the matter rest so easily.

The Headmaster then dismissed both her and Minerva. "Professor McGonagall, would you please escort Miss Snape back to her father's rooms; I am sure he will be anxious to see that she is alright. I will ensure that Miss Brown reaches Gryffindor safely." The pair departed and Albus sent Lavender back to her house by way of his fireplace.

Albus hadn't been satisfied relying on Hermione's word alone, and so he had used Legilimency to enter her mind. He'd been unsurprised to find that he'd been unable to discern what she had been doing beyond the last few hours. It appeared that Hermione, like her father, was a natural Occlumens.

Albus knew that as a natural Occlumens, Severus had such highly honed skills that only an accomplished Legilimens could penetrate his barriers. Even then, they were unlikely to be able to determine what the truth was, and what Severus had fabricated. He would have liked to speak to Severus about Hermione's natural ability but he didn't want to warn his potions master that he had been intruding into his daughter's mind. He wouldn't put it past Severus to risk serious injury in defying Albus and attack him for the intrusion. Yawning, Albus got up; he wanted to check the corridor where the incident had taken place.

Hermione and Minerva walked along in silence until Minerva stopped and turned to Hermione. "Are you alright, Miss Snape?"

Minerva surprised Hermione with her apparent concern. "I am; thank you Professor."

Severus looked up as Hermione entered the room accompanied by Minerva McGonagall, who nodded at Severus, and then left.

As soon as Minerva had closed the door, Severus cast several privacy spells and spun to face his daughter. "Did you take the potion?"

"Yes, what was it?" Hermione questioned her father.

Severus had passed a tiny vial of potion to Hermione under the guise of returning her purse. She had swallowed the potion during her trip to the bathroom.

"I'll explain another time." Severus brushed off his daughter's query, thwarted by his oath to Dumbledore. He couldn't explain to Hermione what the potion was for without telling her that he suspected that the Headmaster might have used Legilimency on her.

"I'm going to sleep here tonight." Hermione kissed her father and headed for her room.

The next week turned out to be a difficult one for Hermione. Everywhere she went, students stared and pointed at her. After a particularly nasty incident where someone attacked her from behind, leaving her stunned and covered in boils, the Outcasts closed ranks on their friend, ensuring that one of them went everywhere with her. Hermione was glad when Friday evening finally arrived and she could escape to her father's rooms.

6th November 1992

Harry left the dungeons and slowly walked back to Ravenclaw. The evening had been a total waste of time. Despite several attempts, Professor Snape had been unable to penetrate Harry's mind at all. Tempers had flared and Harry had been ordered to go back to Ravenclaw Tower, and read the book he now carried in his hand, before returning the following week.

On entering the common room, Harry found it empty. He hadn't realized that it was quite so late. He had been about to head up to bed when a movement by the fireplace caught his eye. Walking over to the fire, Harry spotted what looked like a notebook lying on the floor. Picking it up, Harry noticed that it was stamped 'T.M. Riddle' on the cover. Harry thought it looked a lot like the diary Draco Black had been writing in, but on opening it, Harry found that all the pages were blank. He decided that it couldn't be Draco's.

Not feeling tired, Harry decided to look through the meditation book that Severus had told him to read. Skimming through the pages, Harry noted some interesting points that he thought might be important. After looking in his pockets for something to write on and coming up empty, Harry's eyes fell upon the diary he had just picked up. Deciding that he could always replace it if it turned out to belong to someone in Ravenclaw, Harry took out the biro he usually carried with him; he found muggle pens easier to use and a lot more portable than wizard quills. Opening the diary he began to write.

“Meditative exercises...”

The words vanished from the page almost immediately.

“Draco, is that you?”

Harry dropped the diary in shock. It appeared that it had been Draco’s diary after all. He must have been right when he had teased Pansy about it being a magic diary. Harry picked the diary back up and decided to answer its question.

“Sorry, it’s not. I found this diary lying on the floor by the fire. I think Draco must have dropped it. I didn’t realize that it belonged to anyone when I started writing in it.”

Harry watched as his words vanished and fresh ones took their place.

“That’s okay. I’m sure Draco wouldn’t mind.”

Harry was curious as to what the diary was.

“Are you a magic diary?”

“You could say that. I’m almost akin to a magic mirror, in that I have a personality and can give opinions and advice.”

Harry thought for a moment.

“So that’s why Draco was always writing in you.”

“Yes. He’s been feeling lonely. He needed someone to confide in.”

Harry felt guilty. He knew that Pansy had been Draco’s friend during their first year at Hogwarts, but ever since the new school year had begun, she had tended to gravitate more towards the Outcasts, leaving Draco to his own devices. Words were once more appearing in the diary.

“I almost forgot my manners. My name’s Tom, what’s yours?”

Harry was now not only feeling guilty, but also a little alarmed. He wasn't entirely sure that he felt comfortable with a diary that had a name and could not only write back to him, but also went so far as to apologize for its lack of manners. He wanted to close it, but felt an inexplicable urge to continue writing.

"My name's Harry Lupin. I'm in Ravenclaw with Draco. I think I'd better go to bed now. It's late. I'll give you back to Draco in the morning."

"If you wish. Goodnight, Harry."

Harry closed the diary. He then placed it with his meditation book and carried them both upstairs to the dormitory with him.

7th November 1992

In an attempt to divert the school's attention from the Halloween Ball incident, Dumbledore decided to get Lockhart to begin the dueling club a month earlier than he had planned to. Most of the school had signed up; the girls rushing to get their names down in case there wouldn't be enough room, and the boys in the hope of being able to take on Lockhart in a duel.

Harry wandered into the Great Hall which had been transformed for the night's activity; Luna and Dudley at his side. Luna hadn't really wanted to go but Harry and Dudley had said that Lockhart had to be good at something. They were hoping it would be dueling, as their classes with him so far had been a joke. All Lockhart did was re-enact his stories, usually casting Harry or Dudley in the part of the victim or the fiend that was attacking them. Harry now just went along with whatever Lockhart wanted to do; he couldn't face another evening's interminable detention answering sycophantic fan mail for the man.

A dais had been set up at the back of the Hall and all the students were now crowded around it. Gilderoy was already standing on the dais, dressed in his finest dueling outfit; he thought he looked quite dapper clad from head to toe in lilac and soft butter velvet. He checked the time and turned to face the crowd.

“Welcome, welcome. I hope that everyone has an unimpeded view of me, and that you can all hear me.” Gilderoy flicked his hair backwards as he spoke, drawing a sigh from the girls lined up at the base of the dais.

Severus entered the Hall from the teachers’ entrance. He noted that Lockhart was already standing on the dais. Severus hadn’t wanted to take part but the Headmaster had ‘encouraged’ his participation.

“Ah, Professor Snape.” Gilderoy smiled as Severus mounted the dais. Gilderoy then turned to face the audience. “The Professor has kindly agreed to help me with the first demonstration.”

Everyone looked at Severus, who just about stopped himself from grinding his teeth. He didn’t bother smiling at anyone and moved into position at the opposite end to Lockhart.

Lockhart began his oratory once more. “We will now bow to each other, and then assume the correct dueling position before the countdown begins. The lovely Miss Brown has agreed to count us down from three.”

Standing on a platform set up behind the dais, Lavender blushed prettily and waved at her fellow Gryffindors.

Both men bowed, and Severus fluidly moved into a dueling stance. Harry decided that he was glad he didn’t have to face his Professor, as the man was regarding Lockhart with an almost predatory stare.

On the mark of one, Severus moved forward, his wand moving so quickly that Harry almost missed it, and the next thing anyone knew, Lockhart was sitting on the dais minus his wand and sporting green and silver hair. Lavender gasped.

Lockhart turned to the girl. “I’m quite alright Miss Brown. The Professor was just demonstrating how to disarm someone. I could have quite easily defended myself but it is important to show you youngsters what could happen if you fail to do so.”

“But, Sir, your hair.” Lavender pointed to Lockhart’s hair as she spoke.

Lockhart conjured up a mirror and let out a high pitched scream. "If you will all excuse me, I will be back in a moment." He jumped off the dais, and dashed out of the Great Hall, accompanied by the muted sniggers of most of the boys.

Severus didn't bother to hide his own smirk and turned to face the crowd. "Now that you have seen the correct way to begin a duel, I would like a volunteer pair for a proper demonstration."

Two Slytherin fourth years stepped forward. After a few minutes, it was all over, as Gressley, a spotty faced, dark haired boy, was blasted off the dais by his opponent.

Severus smiled. "Well done, Armitage, ten points to Slytherin."

The dais was now clear again. Severus scanned the room. "Prewett and Potter; up here now."

Ginny had been about to move up to the dais, when Blaise leaned over and whispered in her ear. She grinned at him and moved to take her place on the dais.

"When you are ready." Severus had heard about Ginevra's dislike of the Boy Who Lived. He had a feeling she would be more than able to take care of him.

At the end of the countdown, Jamie threw a disarming spell at Ginny, who dodged it easily while sending back a bat bogey hex. This was a specialty of hers and she smirked as it found its target. Jamie dropped his wand in an effort to get rid of the bats that were now trying to escape out of his nose.

Severus cancelled the spell. "Shall we try again, and this time, try to put a little effort into it, Potter."

Jamie frowned at the Professor and retook his position. This time he moved to the left as he sent a tickling curse at his opponent. Ginny just smirked and dropped to the floor. Her return spell created immediate panic. "Serpensortia plura."

Two huge snakes shot out of the end of Ginny's wand and landed in front of Jamie. Hissing, they raised themselves up from the ground with their hoods extended as they swayed slowly in front of the scared boy.

"Don't move." Severus called out.

He was too late. Unnerved by the sight of the two swaying snakes, Jamie stepped backwards. As he did, one of the snakes shot forward and sank its fangs into his hand, causing him to fall off the dais and onto the floor. Severus vanished the snake that had bitten Jamie but hadn't spotted the second one that was moving quickly towards him.

"No. Leave him alone."

The snake stopped and turned towards the voice.

"He is mine. He killed my mate."

"Please leave him alone."

The argument ended there, as Severus took the opportunity to dispatch the distracted snake. In the back of the Hall everyone had started to back away from Hermione, who just stood there looking surprised. Harry wondered why everyone had begun to move away from his friend.

Severus immediately dismissed the attendees. "This lesson is over. Return to your Houses."

Glancing over to where Jamie was now sitting holding his hand, Severus looked at Colin Creevey and Cho Chang, who were standing by the boy. "Help him up and get him to the hospital wing. Tell Madam Pomfrey he has been bitten by an Egyptian Cobra. She will know what to do."

Still in shock, the pair didn't move. "I suggest you hurry up unless you want to explain to the Headmaster why you let the Boy Who Lived die in your care."

Colin and Cho each grabbed an arm of a sweating Jamie, who was now starting to feel the effects of the venom, and half-carried, half-walked him out of the Hall.

Everyone stared at Hermione as they passed out of the door.

Hermione looked at her father. "What is wrong with everyone? I just shouted at the snake to get away from you."

"Let's go to my rooms." It was at times like these that Severus was grateful he was a teacher at his daughter's school.

Once they reached his rooms, Severus headed for his study and poured himself a large firewhiskey. Hermione watched silently; it was unusual for her father to drink alcohol in her presence. To see him doing so now, and in such a large amount, was somewhat alarming.

"Papa, what's wrong?" Hermione inquired.

"Hermione, have you ever heard of parseltongue?" Severus ignored his daughter's question, and responded with one of his own.

"Of course I have. It's snake language." Hermione wondered why her father had asked her such a simple question.

"A language it appears you have the ability to speak." Severus watched as his daughter's face became a mask of incredulity.

"No, I can't." Hermione argued. She would have known if she could speak a different language.

Severus sighed. "When you spoke to the snake, I couldn't understand what you were saying. None of us could."

Hermione sat down heavily. "This is all I need. Now everyone will think I'm definitely the Heir of Slytherin."

"I'm afraid so." Severus had a sinking feeling that the gossip about his daughter would now intensify.

“What about Prewett? That was a nasty spell she cast. It was her fault that Potter was bitten.” Hermione disliked the first year immensely.

“No-one will remember that. They’ll all just remember that it was you who spoke to the snake.” Severus pointed out.

“I realize that. Where did Prewett learn such a spell? She’s only a first year.” Hermione wanted to know.

Severus thought Hermione a little naïve in her outlook. “That may be so, but I knew of such spells at her age. However, I believe that Zabini provided her with the spell. I saw him whispering to her just before she mounted the stage.”

“Zabini knowing such a spell doesn’t surprise me but I still can’t believe I can speak to snakes.” Hermione was still not convinced about her newfound ability.

Severus stood and cast Serpensortia. A huge boa constrictor shot out of his wand.

“Hello.” Hermione wasn’t sure what else to say.

“Hello, snake speaker.” The boa constrictor didn’t moved and just lifted its head to talk to Hermione.

“Evanesco.” Severus vanished the snake.

“I can talk to snakes.” Hermione sounded as if she still couldn’t believe it.

“You can. Perhaps you should get some sleep. We can discuss this further in the morning.” Severus wanted to be alone.

“Thank you, Papa. Goodnight.” Hermione got up and headed for her room.

“Goodnight.” Severus watched as Hermione closed the door to her room, before going into his study and pouring himself another firewhiskey.

10th November 1992

Augusta Longbottom knocked on her daughter-in-law’s bedroom door. “Alice, can I come in?”

“Please do.” Alice called out. She knew what Augusta had come about. “What can I do for you?”

“As head of the Longbottom family, I want you to retract the marriage offer that has been made to Hermione Snape. We cannot have our name tarnished by maintaining such a low connection.” Augusta told Alice.

“The Snapes are hardly a low connection, Augusta. Their family is almost as old as our own.” Alice argued.

“That may be so, but the girl’s ability is dark and I will not have her name associated with our own. I expect you to write to the Snapes today.” Augusta couldn’t abide anything dark, and the thought of allowing that girl to be part of her family disgusted her to the point of nausea.

“But Neville will be heartbroken.” Alice pointed out.

Augusta was adamant. “Neville will find somebody else. I want that offer withdrawn today.”

Alice sighed. “I’ll write to the Snapes this morning.”

“I knew you would do your duty. Thank you.” Augusta left Alice alone.

Alice wasn’t surprised that news of Hermione’s newly discovered ability had somehow reached Augusta; Alice had heard of the furor surrounding the girl the previous night but had failed to enlighten her mother-in-law. Alice hadn’t been bothered by the revelation. Having

met Hermione during the summer, she had found her pleasant, and extremely polite. She would have been a good match for Neville.

Alice was now more than a little annoyed that her mother-in-law was a lot more concerned about the family image than her grandson's happiness. She contemplated ignoring Augusta's edict and handling matters in her own way but decided that taking such a stance would be counterproductive to her own position. She currently had carte blanche when it came to accessing the Longbottom family vaults; for her own reasons, she preferred to keep it that way. Knowing she had little choice if she wished to maintain the status quo, she picked up her quill and some paper and began her letter to the Snapes.

The next day

Virginie sat with her husband looking over the letter they had received from Alice Longbottom. "It's all my fault. I should be the one to tell Hermione."

"She's on her way here now." Severus told his wife.

A knock at the door signaled Hermione's arrival. "Mama. Is everything okay?"

Hermione was surprised to see her mother so looking grave.

"Hermione, sweetheart, sit down." Virginie patted the seat beside her. "I am so sorry but the Longbottoms have withdrawn their marriage proposal."

Hermione wasn't surprised. "It's because I can speak parseltongue isn't it?"

Virginie nodded. "It is."

"No wonder Neville has been avoiding me. But I don't understand, how is that I can speak parseltongue? You and Papa can't." Hermione bemoaned.

Virginie was about to speak, but she first looked to Severus who nodded. "It's because of me."

Hermione sat in surprised silence.

"What I am about to tell you may come as a bit of a shock." Virginie didn't meet her daughter's eyes as she spoke. "I wasn't born Virginie Lambert, as we told you. I'm also not from Quebec. I was actually born in France as Virginie Claudine Lestrangle."

Hermione gasped. She wondered if her mother was related to Bellatrix and Rodolphus Lestrangle, two infamous deatheaters who were currently being held in Azkaban for the murder of Frank Longbottom, Neville's father.

"I can see you've already made the connection. Rodolphus is my brother. Bellatrix is his wife." Virginie confirmed Hermione's suspicions. "Rabastan, my other brother, fled back to France to avoid prosecution."

"But what have they to do with my ability to speak parseltongue?" Hermione failed to make a connection.

Virginie continued speaking. "The ability to speak in Parseltongue is a Lestrangle family trait which runs through the female line; no male Lestrangle has ever been known to possess this ability. As you might imagine, it is not something we have made public for obvious reasons. In fact, I only told your father of my own ability after he told me about your defense of him against the snake. While I cannot speak the language, I can understand it. I hoped the ability had bypassed this generation."

"I can't tell anyone about this, can I?" Hermione knew that as much as she wanted to put to rest any suspicions about her being the Heir of Slytherin, she couldn't tell anyone about her mother being a Lestrangle nor their affinity towards parseltongue.

Severus now joined the conversation. "I'm afraid not."

Hermione watched as Severus withdrew a small vial from his pocket. The vial looked as if it contained the same potion her father had given her on the night of the Halloween Ball.

Severus explained its use. "It is imperative that no-one finds out who your mother was, nor about her ability. You will need to take this potion once a week. It prevents anyone from being able to use occlumency on you. All they will be able to divine is what you have been doing in the last few hours before they attempted to access your mind. I devised it for your mother as she has little talent in the area of occlumency. However, we will begin lessons tomorrow to see whether you are gifted in this area."

As Severus mentioned her lack of occlumency talent, Virginie sharply nudged him in the ribs. Severus just smiled indulgently at his wife.

Hermione reached out and took the potion. She quickly opened the vial and swallowed it. "This is the same potion you gave me before I went into the Headmaster's office."

"It is." Severus confirmed.

"Then you must have known that the Headmaster would try to use occlumency on me." Hermione deduced.

"I know nothing of the sort." Severus told his daughter, before turning on his heel and heading into his study.

Hermione was surprised at her father's reaction to her statement. A small frown creased her forehead, and she had been about to ask her mother about his strange behavior, when another thought occurred to her. "Mama, why did you need to change your name when you left France? The Lestranges weren't wanted for murder then were they? You can't have left because of your family."

"No, my brothers weren't wanted for murder then but they were wanted for other things. However, you are correct in assuming that my family was not the reason I chose to flee from France. I became engaged to a man who, at first, I found to be totally charming and handsome. It was only when my brother Rodolphus told me more

about him, that I realized that his poise, charm and looks were nothing more than skin deep. He treated me like a princess until he found out that I was less than keen on marrying him. After that he made my life a living hell, until I managed to escape on the eve of the wedding with the help of a friend. On arriving in England, I met Daniel Granger, who fell in love with me and I eventually married him.”

Virginie looked lost in the past.

“Oh, Mama.” Hermione moved to hug her mother. “Why didn’t your father do anything?”

“He couldn’t. That man had more power than my father could ever dream of achieving.” Virginie knew that her father had had less control over her destiny than he had wanted to admit; he had had to go along with her intended’s wishes, his efforts to resist had been as ineffective as those of a leaf’s caught before a mighty storm.

Hermione wondered what type of a man her mother’s fiancé had been. “Who would force a woman to marry him against her will?”

Virginie just shook her head.

“Mama, please tell me.” Hermione begged.

“Voldemort, it was Voldemort.” Virginie struggled to hold back her tears. Even now, she still got upset when she thought about what she had gone through.

“Oh Merlin.” Hermione now understood her mother’s need to cover up who she was and where she had come from.

Virginie dried her eyes and stood up. “I must get back home, Hermione. I don’t like leaving Bright with the children for too long on her own.” Virginie kissed Hermione on the forehead and went to say goodbye to her husband. After her confession, she needed to feel Severus’ arms around her, to help drive away the images she held in her mind.

Stunned, Hermione just sat there. Then, seeing the door to her father’s study begin to open, Hermione got up and scurried out of his

rooms. She needed time alone to digest everything her mother had just told her.

13th November 1992

Caligula Nott finished reading the Daily Prophet and smiled at his wife. "I want you to write to the Snapes and repeat our offer of marriage."

"But they refused the first one." Juno Nott pointed out.

"Yes, and I let it go because Hermione Snape had already received another offer. Severus will not dare let her refuse our son this time. I would consider such a refusal to be an insult of the highest degree." Caligula countered. Also, Caligula had friends in high places and knew that with a few words placed in the right ear, Severus would find himself with a few less vital contacts in the potions world.

After hearing of Hermione's dark ability and reading of Longbottom's retraction of his marriage offer, Caligula decided that Hermione would make a good addition to the family after all. Normally, no second offer would be made once the first had been declined, but circumstances allowed it in cases where a refusal had been given because the woman had already accepted an alternative offer.

"They can still refuse if she accepts another offer." Juno pointed out.

"Who else is going to offer for her? Certainly no one from a 'Light' family. No, she will marry Theo whether she likes it or not." Caligula glowered at his wife; he wasn't used to having his will questioned.

Juno knew better than to argue with her husband and departed for her rooms to resubmit an offer of marriage to the Snape girl. She wasn't happy about it; she didn't want to see her son being forced into a loveless marriage in the same way she had been.

The next day

Severus swore angrily. He had just received the Notts' letter. He called for Salty. "Find my daughter and get her to come here."

Salty, on seeing how angry Severus was, silently disappeared. Ten minutes later Hermione knocked on the door of her father's rooms and went in. Five minutes after entering the room, the girl ran out in tears, leaving her father cursing the name Nott.

Hermione darted into the bedroom she shared with Daphne and threw herself onto her bed in tears; Daphne close behind her. She had seen the tears flowing down Hermione's cheeks as the girl had blindly ran past her, and had decided to follow her.

"What's wrong?" Daphne asked her friend.

Hermione just shook her head. "Can you get Nott for me?"

Daphne wondered why Hermione wanted to see Nott, but did as her friend requested. "I think I saw him in the common room; I'll just check."

A short time later, Theo knocked on the door. "Hermione, it's Theo."

By now Hermione had stopped crying. She opened the door to let Theo in and, without hesitation, came straight to the point of her summons. "Your parents have reissued the marriage offer. Now that Neville has withdrawn his, Papa has said that I cannot refuse this new offer."

Theo sat down heavily. "What do you expect me to do about it?"

"Can't you talk to your parents about it?" Hermione pleaded.

Theo shook his head. "They won't listen to me. I'll have to marry you whether I like it or not."

Hermione felt the tears returning. She had hoped that Theo would have been able to do something to dissuade his parents from pursuing the renewed offer.

"Excuse me." Theo got up and walked out. The boy wouldn't have admitted it, but he felt close to tears himself, and he didn't want Hermione to see him cry.

Hermione watched as the door shut. Feeling trapped she got up and, after grabbing her cloak, left the room. She decided to head out for the lake; it was where she always went when she needed to think.

Harry was coming in from quidditch practice when he spotted Hermione walking down by the lake. Things had felt a little strained between them lately, so Harry decided that he would try to speak to her while she was alone.

He turned to Dudley. "Can you take my broom? I'm going to catch up with Hermione."

Dudley took his brother's broom and set off for the quidditch storage shed.

"Hermione." A voice interrupted Hermione's thoughts, and she looked up to see Harry coming towards her.

"Hi Harry. I'm sorry, but I'd like to be alone." Hermione knew that if Harry showed any concern she would probably end up in tears again.

"Hermione, what's wrong?" Harry could see from her eyes that Hermione had been crying.

"Oh bother." Hermione burst into tears but wouldn't let Harry pull her into his embrace. She took a deep breath and gained some control over her tattered emotions. "It's Nott. His parents have reissued the marriage proposal. Now that Neville's withdrawn his offer, I can't refuse it again."

Harry couldn't see why not. "Why not? It's not as if they can do anything to you if you refuse."

"You know how wizarding family politics work. The Notts are extremely powerful and they can make things difficult for my father; not to mention that it would be considered an insult to refuse their offer." Hermione pointed out to her friend.

Harry fell silent. He'd known the Notts were influential; he just hadn't realized how much. Hermione appeared to be right; she couldn't refuse the offer a second time.

"Can't Nott do anything?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. "He does what his parents tell him to. He said that they won't listen to him."

Harry was at a loss. "I'm so sorry, Hermione."

"That's okay. Please, I'd really like to be on my own now." Hermione walked away, leaving Harry standing alone.

Deciding to give Hermione some space, Harry headed off to the showers.

As Harry was talking to Hermione, Luna looked up as she heard a loud bang. Draco Black, who had been sitting in the chair opposite her, suddenly collapsed onto the floor. Luna got up and rushed over to him. "Draco, can you hear me?"

"Help me." Draco opened his eyes for a moment but didn't move.

"I'll help you." Pansy suddenly appeared at Luna's side. "Let's get him to the hospital wing."

Between them, the two girls managed to help Draco to his feet, eschewing the offers of help they received from the other Ravenclaws who had been in the common room.

On entering the hospital wing, Pansy called out. "We need help."

Madam Pomfrey bustled her way into the room. She took one look at Draco and levitated the boy out of the girls' grasps and onto a bed. "I'll deal with him. You can go back to Ravenclaw now."

Both girls shook their heads. "We want to stay."

Madam Pomfrey relented. "Okay, but please stay out of my way."

The girls watched as Madam Pomfrey checked Draco over. She then turned to the girls and spoke in an urgent voice. "I really need you to leave right now."

Pansy was frightened by the nurse's tone. "Is he going to be okay?"

"I don't know." Poppy admitted.

Luna gently put her arm around Pansy and steered her out of the room. "He'll be okay."

"But Madam Pomfrey..." Pansy got no further before starting to cry. She'd neglected Draco for so long, and she couldn't believe that he might die before she made things right with him.

"Come on. I know where the kitchens are. Let's go and sneak a cup of hot chocolate." Luna led the distraught girl away from the hospital wing and towards the kitchens. The Weasley twins had been more than happy to show her how they obtained their illicit provisions.

In the hospital wing, Poppy ran to the fireplace and threw floo powder into it. "Severus Snape."

Severus' head appeared in the fireplace after a few moments. "What is it, Poppy?"

"It's Draco Black. I need your help." Poppy sounded short, and she quickly moved away from the fireplace and back to her patient.

Severus stepped out of the fireplace and hurried over to Draco's bed. "What's wrong with him?"

"He has severe withdrawal symptoms. If I didn't know better, I'd think it was alcohol withdrawal symptoms but my scans reveal no use of alcohol within the last few days. His pulse is racing, and I'm afraid he's going to have a heart attack. I've tried all the usual remedies but none of them are working." Poppy was at her wit's end.

Suddenly Draco stiffened and his body began to convulse.

"He's seizing." Severus moved swiftly, placing cushioning spells around the boy's bed. After a few minutes, Draco stopped convulsing and flopped back onto the bed.

Poppy checked him over. "He's okay now, but I'm worried that he might have another fit."

Draco suddenly began to vomit. Severus gently held the boy's head up until he'd finished being ill so that he wouldn't choke. After cleaning up the mess, Severus laid Draco back onto the bed, noticing that the boy had now also started to shake.

"You're right. He's displaying classic withdrawal symptoms." Severus took out his own wand. He also couldn't detect any signs of previous use of alcohol or potions, and was at a loss to explain Draco's symptoms. "One of us will need to stay with him. I'll stay until midnight. I can ask Filius to take over then. He has some medical training. If Draco gets any worse, I'll let you know."

"Thank you, Severus." Poppy was relieved. She was currently run off her feet with several cases of the flu, and monitoring Ron Prewett, who was still in his petrified state. Imelda Grant, the seventh year trainee, would take over from her later tonight.

Severus sat and watched Draco shivering. Luckily the boy was still unconscious. Poppy hadn't wanted to give him anything while he was expurgating whatever had caused the withdrawal. Severus summoned his house elf with instructions to get a few of his books; he could at least indulge in a little reading while he kept a vigil over Draco.

15th November 1992

Virginie rose from her bed and was surprised to find Bright standing with an envelope in her hand. "What is it Bright?"

"This is for you, Mistress Snape." Bright handed over the envelope.

Virginie took the letter. Skimming quickly through its contents, she was surprised to find yet another offer of marriage for Hermione.

Virginie hurriedly got dressed. "Bright, please look after the children. I'll be back as soon as I can."

Virginie headed downstairs and was soon seated in a carriage heading for the departure point of Snape Manor. It was at times like this that she wished that the fireplace in the main house had been connected to the floo network. She just hoped that Severus hadn't answered the Notts' letter yet.

Hermione was miserably eating breakfast when her father appeared at the table. "Please come with me."

Hermione got up and followed Severus out of the Great Hall. "Is everything alright, Papa?"

"Yes. I need you to go to my rooms. Your mother is there and needs to speak to you." Severus told his daughter. He then headed off to the hospital wing to resume his watch over Draco, who still hadn't regained consciousness.

Hermione entered her father's rooms. Her mother was waiting for her, and Hermione ran into her welcoming arms. "Oh, Mama. I can't bear it. I can't marry Nott."

Virginie smiled at Hermione. "You may not have to. You've received an offer from someone else, but it is not your usual offer of marriage."

"If it's not a marriage offer, then what is it?" Hermione wondered who could be interested in making any kind of offer for her, especially now that her parseltongue talent had been broadcast far and wide.

"Sorry, I'm not making myself clear. It is a marriage proposal but it's unusual because it contains a couple of uncommon conditions." Virginie explained.

"What conditions?" Hermione asked.

“There are three. The first is that the marriage will not take place until you are eighteen. The strange ones are the second and third conditions. Until the marriage takes place, you are both free to see other people, and finally, if you so wish, you can rescind your acceptance at any time.” Virginie set out the conditions outlined in the letter of offer.

“So I can accept this proposal, date other people, and then back out if I don’t wish to marry this person?” Hermione looked to her mother for clarification.

“That is correct.” Virginie verified Hermione’s understanding.

“I want to accept then.” Hermione told her mother. She knew she wouldn’t get a better offer than this.

“Without knowing who it is from?” Virginie was surprised that Hermione hadn’t queried who her potential suitor was before accepting the proposal.

Hermione grinned. “I forgot about that in my excitement at not having to marry Nott. Who is it from?”

Meanwhile Severus reached the hospital wing to find that Draco now had company.

“Snivellus, I’d like to say it’s a pleasure, but I’d be lying.” Sirius Black sneered.

Severus went for his wand; his antipathy towards the nemesis of his schooldays almost engulfing him. “What are you doing here, Black?”

“That’s Lord Black to you, Snivellus.” Sirius enjoyed seeing Severus struggling to contain his temper.

Poppy Pomfrey moved between the rivals. “This is hospital wing, not a playground. If you want to fight, take it outside. I have sick patients here.”

Both men looked suitably chastised and apologized to the nurse, who turned to Severus. "Severus, he's here to see Draco."

"Let me know when he's gone." Severus turned on his heel and walked back out of the hospital ward, wishing it wasn't too early to indulge in a glass of firewhiskey. Knowing that Virginie would probably still be talking to Hermione, he decided to head down to his rooms to see if his daughter had made up her mind about which offer she was going to accept.

I hope to update by the end of the week, but I can't promise. My husband is returning early from his business trip and the summer semester has now started for me. Thanks again for everyone who taken the time to read this.

Chapter 21: Harry, Tom and Hermione

Severus entered his rooms just as Hermione was questioning her mother as to the identity of her suitor.

“Who on earth is Felidae Venant?” Hermione asked.

Her mother shook her head. “I have no idea.”

Severus looked to his daughter. “You now have a choice to make. You can either accept the offer from your unknown suitor, or go with the option of marrying someone you know.”

Hermione thought for a moment. “I’d rather take my chances with Mr. Venant, whoever he is.”

Virginie had had a feeling that her daughter would choose the unknown suitor. “Are you sure?”

“I am.” Hermione felt safe knowing that she could opt out of the offer at any time up until her eighteenth birthday. She just hoped that she found someone before then who would want to marry her.

“Then it’s settled. I’ll write back to the Notts and refuse their offer once more. Hopefully this time they will get the message.” Severus smiled as he took both letters into his study to compose suitable responses to them.

Dear Caligula and Juno

I hope my letter finds you both well. I was honored that you would reconsider your offer to my daughter, Hermione. However, I must once again offer you my sincere apologies as I regret to inform you that my daughter has already received, and accepted, another offer.

My wife and I both wish you and your family good health and happiness.

Deepest regards.

Severus Snape

Severus smirked to himself. He knew that Caligula would try and make things difficult for him now that Hermione had again refused to marry his son. Severus didn't care however. He was just glad that his daughter wouldn't be forced into a marriage she didn't want because of pureblood customary law. Also, Severus was only too well aware that many of his potions contacts were pureblood traditionalists who would follow the rules of propriety to the letter. They would consider his daughter completely within her rights to refuse the Notts' offer as she had already accepted another. Caligula would find it harder than he thought to impede Severus' connections with the potions world.

Severus then set out to compose a response to the mysterious Venant.

Dear Mr. Venant,

I would like to thank you for requesting the hand of my daughter, Hermione, in marriage. My wife and I have spoken with her, and she is delighted to accept your offer provided the three conditions you set out are adhered to.

We are hosting a family dinner at Snape Manor on 21st November, and we would be delighted if you could attend as our guest. I will meet you at The Three Broomsticks at 7pm to escort you to my home, should you choose to accept this invitation.

Regards.

Severus Snape

Felidae Venant opened Severus' letter and smiled. He was relieved that Hermione had accepted his proposition. He thought about the dinner invitation and decided to accept.

Severus sat in his study and opened the letter which had just arrived for him.

Dear Mr. Snape,

I would be delighted to accept your invitation to dinner. I look forward to meeting you and your family on Saturday, and will meet you at The Three Broomsticks as requested.

Warmest regards.

Felidae Venant

21st November 1992

Harry marched into the Great Hall and up to the Ravenclaw table. Draco and Pansy were both already seated at the table.

“Harry, come sit down.” Draco waved Harry over.

A short time after his uncle’s visit, Draco had recovered from his unknown affliction, and since then Pansy hadn’t let him out of her sight. Frightened by his brush with death, and feeling somewhat lost without the companionship of the diary, Draco had given into Pansy’s demands and had become part of the Outcasts. Harry and the others had welcomed him with open arms, and even though it had only been a few days since he’d joined the group, Draco already felt like an integral part of the Outcasts. Even so, Draco still occasionally wished he had the diary to turn to, and a small part of him regretted throwing it into the fire. However, without the diary to rely on, and remembering Harry’s kindness to him after one of his blackouts, Draco still felt as if he needed someone he could put his trust in, and as a consequence he’d pretty much attached himself to Harry.

Harry had just sat down when Hedwig flew in. Harry took the letter off her leg and ripped it open, only to stuff it into his pocket, disgusted after reading its contents.

Pansy reached over and put her hand over Harry’s. ‘Is everything alright?’

Pulling his hand away, Harry just nodded curtly at her, and got up. “Excuse me, there’s something I need to do.”

Down in her Slytherin bedroom, Hermione woke up feeling a little excited. She hadn't told her parents but she was quite eager to meet her unknown suitor. Getting dressed she headed off to the Great Hall for breakfast. Harry was waiting for her outside the entrance.

"Hi Hermione. Can I have a word?" Harry asked.

"Right now?" Hermione was quite hungry.

"Please. Let's go down to the lake." Harry took Hermione by the arm and led her away from the room.

Hermione sighed as she took one last look at the food piled on the tables.

As they reached the lake, Harry turned to her. "Is it true that you've accepted an offer from someone you don't even know?"

Shivering, Hermione wished that Harry had chosen somewhere a little warmer to hold their discussion. "Yes, it is. You know what the alternative was."

"How do you know that this person won't be worse than Nott?" Harry sounded concerned.

"I don't, but I'm willing to take my chances." Hermione had agreed with her parents that they wouldn't disclose the conditions of the offer to anyone.

Harry didn't look happy. "What about Neville? He's really upset that you don't want to talk to him."

Hermione was amazed that Harry would even bother to bring up the subject of Neville, especially after how Neville had treated her. "Neville has no right to be upset about anything. He practically ignored me after the parseltongue incident, and then he withdrew his marriage offer."

"That was his mother." Harry pointed out.

"It doesn't matter who it was. Anything between me and Neville is now over." Hermione wanted to get back to the Great Hall, and turned to leave, only for Harry to roughly grab her by the arm. "Harry, you're hurting me."

Harry let go. "I'm sorry. I just don't want you to leave. Things between us have seemed so awkward lately. Not to mention the fact that I've got Neville complaining about you, Draco following me around like a lost sheep, and Pansy thinking that we are dating just because I took her to the Halloween Ball."

Hermione looked at Harry. Her easygoing friend had seemed out of sorts for the last few weeks, and didn't look as if he had been sleeping well. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I've got to get some breakfast before leaving for Snape Manor. I'm meeting my fiancé at dinner tonight." The word 'fiancé' felt strange on Hermione's tongue. "Look, we can get together tomorrow."

"Whatever." Harry spat out the word and, without bothering to say goodbye, headed back to the school.

Hermione watched as Harry walked away from her. She didn't know what was wrong with her friend but his behavior had been totally out of character. She then wondered how Harry had known that she didn't personally know Felidae Venant. The Daily Prophet had printed the marriage declaration the previous day but nothing had been mentioned about her not being acquainted with her intended. Deciding that she would worry about it tomorrow, she headed in the same direction Harry had just gone in.

Later that evening

Hermione checked her reflection once more before going down to join her parents in the dining room. A tall dark-haired man stood with his back to her.

Seeing Hermione come in, Severus addressed his guest. "Felidae, I would like you to meet my daughter, Hermione."

Hermione nearly gasped when the stranger turned around; he was absolutely gorgeous. His black hair fell lazily around his chiseled face; his eyes were a vivid green, reminding her a little of Harry's natural eye color. Hermione felt herself blushing as he approached her and took her hand. "Miss Snape, the pleasure is all mine."

Felidae watched, almost amused, as he saw the reaction his looks had on the girl. Even though she was only thirteen, he could already see signs of the pretty young woman she would become.

For once in her life, Hermione was almost speechless. She couldn't believe that this stranger was interested in her; he could have picked any woman he wanted. Finding her voice, she managed to force out a greeting. "I'm pleased to meet you."

Felidae withdrew his hand and turned to face Severus and Virginie. "I am aware of the impropriety of my request, but I wonder if it would be possible to speak with your daughter alone?"

Virginie recognizing the man's obvious need for some privacy, put a hand on Severus' arm to warn him to say nothing. "Of course, you may use the study across the hall. Hermione, please show Mr. Venant into the study."

Hermione nervously led the way into the study. "Please come in. What do you wish to discuss with me?"

Felidae closed the door and turned to Hermione. "Before I say anything more, I should be grateful if you would give me your oath that what we are about to discuss, will stay strictly between the two of us, Miss Snape."

Hermione wondered what was so important that this stranger felt the need to extract an oath from her. Knowing that she wouldn't find out unless she complied with his request, she took out her wand. "I swear that we discuss will stay between the two of us, unless we both agree otherwise, and please, call me Hermione."

Felidae visibly relaxed. "Thank you, Hermione. Please feel free to call me Felidae. I must be honest though, my real name isn't actually

Felidae Venant. For reasons I won't go into at the moment, I would prefer not to reveal my true identity to you just yet."

Hermione wasn't entirely surprised. She'd never heard of anyone with a name like Felidae Venant. She looked carefully at him. If he'd lied about his name, she wondered if he was also covering up what he really looked like. "Are you really that good looking?"

Hermione then blushed, realizing that she had let Venant know that she found him attractive.

Felidae grinned. "No, I'm not. I'm far better looking!"

Hermione wanted to laugh at his cheeky comment. "Are you going to show me what you really look like? I've already taken an oath not to reveal anything without your agreement."

Deciding it couldn't do any harm, Felidae dropped his glamour. "See, I told you I was far better looking."

He'd been right, he was. Hermione was once more struck speechless.

Felidae watched Hermione's brow crinkle into a frown. "You know who I am, don't you?"

Hermione shook her head. "No, but you do look awfully familiar."

"All I ask is that should you work it out, that you don't reveal it to anyone." Felidae was surprised. He hadn't really expected Hermione to recognize him; otherwise he wouldn't have dropped his glamour.

"Of course I won't; I've already sworn a oath. We should return to the dining room now." Hermione started to move towards the door.

Felidae stopped her by placing a hand gently on her should. "Actually, that wasn't what I brought you in here for."

Hermione felt her heart begin to race a little. "Why did you bring me in here then?"

Felidae exhaled. "I can't tell you who I am at the moment but I would like to at least be candid as to why I am doing this."

Curious, Hermione indicated that he should continue. "Please, go on."

"My offer for you stems from a friend's request." He started to explain.

"A request?" Hermione questioned.

"Yes. My friend wrote to me asking for my assistance. My friend's son had written to him asking for his help to get you out of the Nott situation. My friend knew that my knowledge of pureblood rituals and customs is almost unrivalled; so far as I know, only my mother, who is an archivist, knows more than I do." Felidae smiled as he thought of his bright and bubbly mother.

"Why would you make an offer just because your friend asked for your help?" Hermione was a little puzzled.

Felidae sighed; he knew Hermione wasn't going to like his answer. "I don't mean to be insulting but I did it to fulfill a life debt that I owed to my friend."

"Oh." Despite Felidae's assertion that he didn't mean to be insulting, Hermione still felt a little upset. No girl wanted to hear that someone had proposed to them because of a debt.

Felidae continued. "I owed my friend the life debt after he rescued me from a situation that I had voluntarily gotten myself into. He risked his own life to save me. I would have died without his help."

Hermione struggled to hold back her tears and looked down at the floor. She'd known that something more must have prompted Felidae to propose; someone who looked the way he did couldn't really have been interested in a plain, young girl like her. "I understand."

Felidae gently put a hand under Hermione's chin, and tilted it up so that she had to meet his eyes. "I don't think you do. Even if I hadn't owed the life debt, I would still have made the offer to you."

Not really convinced by Felidae's protestation, Hermione moved out of his grip, and decided to steer the discussion into a less hurtful direction. "So, who is your friend?"

Felidae just smiled. "My friend asked me not to reveal his identity."

Hermione then thought about what Felidae had just told her. "You said your friend's son had written to him to ask for help. It must be someone I know then."

Having very few male friends, and even fewer that would go to such lengths for her, Hermione deduced who it must have been. "Your friend's son is Harry Lupin, isn't it?"

Felidae was surprised at Hermione's shrewd observation, and decided that he might as well be totally frank with her. It wasn't as if she could discuss the matter with anyone else. "It is. Harry even offered to marry you himself, if no other way could be found to extricate you from the situation."

Hermione felt her heart leap at the thought of Harry's selfless act. Then she thought about how she had pushed him aside that morning at the lake. At least she knew now how Harry had been aware that she didn't know Felidae. "Now I feel really guilty; I wasn't very nice to Harry today. He came to see me to complain about my accepting your offer without knowing who you were."

"Harry obviously cares about you a great deal." Felidae pointed out.

Hermione nodded, and responded in a flat tone. "I know. He considers me his best friend."

Felidae hid his smile. Hermione obviously cared for Harry in more than just a friendly way and, from what Remus had told him, he had every reason to believe that Harry felt the same way. "His concern for you would appear to be far more than just for his best friend."

Hermione dismissed Felidae's comment. "Harry would have done the same for any of his friends."

“What, even the boys?” Felidae couldn’t resist mocking Hermione’s comment.

Hermione laughed, which was the result Felidae had been aiming for.

A thought then occurred to Hermione. “Why didn’t Harry just offer me the same deal as you did?”

“Remus, Harry’s father, wouldn’t allow it. I told Remus that, in accordance with pureblood customs, this time you would have to accept an offer and not just hold it in abeyance, in order to avoid becoming engaged to Nott. I did offer up the idea of the agreement but he was worried that if you refused to rescind it before your eighteenth birthday, Harry would be forced to marry you. With no alternative available, I offered up myself in Harry’s place. Remus then told me that he considered the life debt fulfilled.” Felidae explained.

“Did you know that Remus was going to cancel the life debt in exchange for your taking Harry’s place?” Hermione’s ego needed bolstering, and she hoped that he would answer in the negative.

Felidae shook his head. “No, I didn’t. When I offered, I was doing it purely as a favor to a friend.”

Hermione now appreciated that Felidae had been telling the truth earlier when he had said that he would have done it, even without the inducement of the cancellation of the life debt. She also appreciated the fact that this man had taken a huge risk in trying to help out a friend. If Hermione had decided to continue with the engagement, Felidae would have found himself trapped in a marriage he didn’t really want.

Even so, knowing what she did now, Hermione still couldn’t resist teasing him. “What are you going to do, if I reach eighteen and decide that you are my one true love?”

Felidae went a little pale. “I will marry you, of course.”

Hermione grinned. “Don’t worry. I give you my word that I won’t make you marry me, unless you fall madly in love with me of course!”

Felidae barked out a laugh; he hadn't known that she had such a wicked sense of humor. "Who knows? Stranger things have happened. Now perhaps we should rejoin your parents before they begin to wonder what I have done with you."

Smirking, Hermione let Felidae lead her out of the room.

Back at Hogwarts Harry walked into the common room to find Luna, Draco, Dudley and Pansy all huddled around a table playing partnered chess.

Pansy's face lit up at the sight of him, and she patted a chair next to her. "Hi Harry, do you want to sit down?"

"Thanks." Harry smiled amiably at Pansy who promptly slipped her hand into his. "Actually, I was thinking of going for a walk. Would you like to come with me?"

Pansy felt her tummy flop over with nerves. "I'd love to. I'll just go get my cloak."

Harry watched as she ran up to the girl's dormitory. Dudley looked up from the game. "You've only got an hour before curfew."

"I know. I just need some fresh air." Harry got up as Pansy came back down.

Dudley stared at the pair as they headed out of the common room hand in hand. Something wasn't right with Harry. He didn't know what was wrong but lately his brother hadn't seemed like himself. Shaking his head, Dudley turned his attention back to the game. He would speak to Harry later.

As the pair passed the entrance to the second floor, Harry stopped. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Pansy asked.

"I'm not sure; I thought I heard a voice." Harry told her.

Feeling inexplicably uncomfortable, Pansy pulled Harry down a few stairs. "It's probably nothing. Come on, let's go."

He pulled his hand out of hers. "I'm going to have a look."

Pansy watched as Harry disappeared in the direction of the Headmaster's office. Not wanting him to think she was scared, she set off after him. She was surprised when she couldn't find him.

"Harry, where are you?" No reply came back to her.

Suddenly, she suddenly heard a strange grinding noise coming from the room to her left. "Harry, are you in there?"

Pulling out her wand with a shaky hand, Pansy uttered "Lumos" and entered the room she had heard the noise coming from. As she did so, she stepped into something wet. Surprised, she dropped her wand. Looking down to see where she had dropped it, she didn't notice a large hole where one of the sinks should have been. She also missed the creature sliding out from within the hole's confines.

Harry entered the Ravenclaw common room. "Has anyone seen Pansy? We'd gotten downstairs when she said that she had forgotten something and would be back in a minute. That was almost an hour ago."

Luna answered. "She hasn't been back here. Do you suppose she's okay?"

"I don't know." Harry looked worried.

"She probably saw someone she knew, or perhaps she went to the library." Dudley suggested.

"I've looked there already." Harry told him.

"It's not like Pansy. If she said she would only be a minute, then I know she wouldn't have taken much longer that. Besides, she really likes you Harry. No way would she have just gone off and not come

back.” Draco knew his friend would never have just left Harry waiting. “We need to tell Professor Flitwick.”

Cho Chang looked up. “He’s not here. He’s gone to some Ministry function this evening.”

“What should we do?” Harry asked Draco.

“Let’s split into groups and go look for her.” Luna chimed in.

Cho disagreed. “I’m not sure that’s a good idea. I’ll fire call Professor McGonagall.” She stood up and threw floo powder into the Ravenclaw fireplace, calling out the Professor’s name.

Professor McGonagall’s head appeared within a few moments. “What is it, Miss Chang?”

Cho explained what had happened. “Should we go look for her ourselves?”

“Absolutely not. Please all stay where you are. I’ll be there momentarily.” The Professor told Cho. A few moments later she was brushing the dust off her clothing as she stepped into the Ravenclaw common room.

“Mr. Lupin, where did you last see Miss Parkinson?” Minerva asked the scared looking second year.

“On the ground floor. We were about to go out for a walk when she said that she had forgotten something and would be back in a minute.” Harry told the teacher the same thing as he had told his friends. “After almost half an hour had gone by and she hadn’t come back, I went looking for her. I couldn’t find her so I came back here. It’s now been almost an hour since I last saw her.”

“Everyone please stay here. I’ll be back as soon as I can.” Minerva headed for the door and once outside, changed into her animagus form. She knew she would be able to see better in her cat form in the dimly lit corridors.

After searching every floor, and alerting various staff members along the way, Minerva finally found herself on the second floor. She'd deliberately left this floor until last, not wanting to involve Lockhart unless she really had to. Padding up the corridor, she suddenly noticed a small puddle of water trailing out of the disused girls' bathroom. Transforming, she pulled out her wand and walked cautiously into the room. Looking down, she realized that she'd found Pansy.

Harry entered Dumbledore's office with Minerva following closely behind him. "You wanted to see me Sir?"

"Ah, Mr. Lupin. I did. Professor McGonagall tells me that you were the last person to see Miss Parkinson before she was found in the girl's bathroom." Dumbledore smiled kindly at the boy.

Harry was shaking as he sat down. "Yes, Sir. We were going for a walk when she realized she had forgotten something and headed back to Ravenclaw to get it. I should have gone with her."

Professor McGonagall patted his shoulder. "There now, Mr. Lupin, you couldn't have known that anything would happen to her."

Dumbledore didn't think that Harry had anything to do with what had happened to Miss Parkinson but, after what had happened to him the last time he tried to access Harry's mind, he didn't dare try Legilimency to check Harry's story. "Is there anything else you can tell me?"

Harry just shook his head. "No, Sir."

"Since there's nothing else Mr. Lupin can tell us about what happened, I'll escort him back to the Ravenclaw common room." Minerva started to head towards the door.

"Professor, might I suggest you use the fireplace. I don't want anyone wandering the hallways this late at night." Dumbledore told her.

Grateful for his offer, Minerva was soon stepping into the Ravenclaw common room, with Harry in tow. Turning to the boy, she put a

comforting hand on his shoulder. “Mr. Lupin, please remember that this isn’t your fault. Now off to bed with you, and do try to get some sleep.” With that, she stepped back into the fireplace and disappeared in a flash of green flames.

Harry headed up to his room and, not bothering to undress, lay down on his bed.

“Harry, you okay?” Dudley had waited for his brother to return.

“Yeah. I just want to go to sleep.” Harry told Dudley.

Harry then sat up and pulled the curtains around his bed so that they hid him from view. After casting silencing spells around his bed, he pulled out the diary and a biro from under his pillow. Opening the diary he began to write.

“Tom?”

“Yes, Harry?”

“I’m scared.”

“Why?”

“I was going downstairs for a walk with Pansy, like you suggested, when I suddenly thought I heard a noise as we were going past the second floor entrance. The next thing I knew, I was standing on the ground floor. I have a vague memory of Pansy saying she had forgotten something and would be back after a few minutes. She never came back.”

“What happened?”

“I went looking for her but couldn’t find her anywhere. In the end, one of my teachers found her in the girls’ bathroom on the second floor.”

“Was she alright?”

Harry shook his head before realizing that Tom couldn’t see him.

“No. What if I did it to her?”

“Do you think you did something to her?”

“Of course not.”

“Then don’t worry then.”

Harry stopped writing.

“Are you still there, Harry?”

“Yes. I’m just thinking.”

“About what?”

“My memory of Pansy saying she was going to get something.”

“Why?”

“Because the memory doesn’t feel right.”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s almost as if the memory is all foggy.”

“What do you mean, foggy?”

Harry thought for a moment.

“I don’t know; it’s hard to describe. It’s almost as if I was looking at the memory through a dirty mirror.”

“You’ve received a nasty shock. Shock can do strange things to people’s memory.”

“Perhaps you’re right. I think I need to get some sleep. Goodnight, Tom.”

“Goodnight, Harry.”

Harry closed the diary and put it back under his bed. Ten minutes later he was asleep.

In the diary, Tom was deep in thought. He hadn't been surprised when Harry had told him that the memory of Pansy leaving had seemed foggy. It had been a fake memory that he had planted in the boy's mind after taking him over.

Tom then contemplated his pet's victims. The cat had been a trial run, and had been no great loss to anyone. The boy, Ron, had been a mistake; he had sent Carus after the mudblood photographer who followed the Boy Who Lived and his sidekick everywhere. Carus had been closing in on her prey, when the mudblood had suddenly ran back off to the Great Hall, leaving the redheaded boy, Ron, alone. Luckily for Ron, he had only seen his Carus' reflection in the window, as she returned to her lair.

Pansy's attack, however, had been deliberate. Despite the girl being a pureblood, Tom had grown sick of reading Harry's complaints about her. Deciding to get rid of her, he'd persuaded Harry to ask the girl to take a walk with him. Tom still couldn't believe that Pansy had managed to drop her wand in a puddle at the exact moment Carus had emerged from the tunnels below. The girl had only seen a reflection of his pet in the puddle, thereby rendering her immobile, rather than dead.

Tom knew that he couldn't try anything again yet, as he had only just started to gain Harry's trust. As Harry's trust in Tom had grown, Harry had eventually opened up about his friends and family. Harry had explained that he didn't really know who his parents had been and that he had been adopted. Of all Harry's friends, Tom was most interested in Hermione Snape. Harry had told Tom of everyone shunning his best friend, just because she was a parselmouth. Tom knew of only one other family, besides his own, who was able to converse in parseltongue, and they were definitely pureblood. Once he regained his body, Tom decided that Hermione might be worth using as a vessel to carry his future heir.

Tom laughed to himself as he recalled that, at first, Carus had actually wanted to eat Harry but Tom had pointed out that it was through Harry that he was able to release her from her confines in the Chamber. His pet had complained that the boy wasn't pure and she should therefore be allowed to feed upon him. Tom had forbidden her to do so, leading to her slithering off in a sulk.

Even though Harry wasn't a pureblood, Tom could feel the potentially untapped power that ran through the boy, which was, even now, feeding his own growing consciousness. However, as much as Tom reveled in the power that Harry possessed, Tom contemplated whether he needed to find another host. He'd experienced great difficulty in possessing Harry. Even though Harry trusted him now, the boy had almost thrown Tom's influence off on more than occasion. More frustrating, however, was Tom's inability to access Harry's deepest thoughts and memories. He'd been able to skim Harry's mind for surface thoughts but that had been all. It wasn't as if the boy was a natural Occlumens, he wasn't, and Tom knew that; after all, he was a master at Legilimency, even at his young age.

The idea of having to find a new host was most vexing. First, Draco had proved more resilient than he had would have ever thought possible; resulting in the boy throwing the diary into the heart of the Ravenclaw fire. Now Harry appeared to be growing more resistant to him as well. However, with Harry's latent power almost acting as a drug for him, Tom decided to wait it out and see what happened the next time he tried to take Harry over.

The next day

Harry awoke early. He still couldn't believe that Pansy had been attacked. Deciding he couldn't lie in bed, he got up and headed down to the common room, where he was surprised to find Draco sitting by the fireplace, reading a book.

"Draco, what are you doing up?" Harry asked.

"I could ask you the same thing." Draco retorted.

"Are you okay?" Harry noticed the dark circles beneath Draco's eyes.

Draco shook his head. "Not really. I couldn't sleep last night thinking about what happened to Pansy."

Harry looked guilty. "I'm so sorry. I really shouldn't have left her alone."

"Don't be silly. You couldn't have known what would happen." Draco pointed out.

Harry smiled; at least Draco didn't blame him. "Thanks."

"Come on, let's go get some breakfast." Draco put down his book.

Harry's stomach rumbled at the thought of breakfast and he quickly headed for the exit, Draco close behind him.

Hermione had gotten up early and saw Harry coming into the Great Hall. She jumped up and hurried over to him. "Hi Harry."

"Hermione, I didn't think you'd be back yet." Harry kept his voice neutral.

"Papa and I came back last night. I have a lot of homework I need to get done before tomorrow." Hermione explained. "Look Harry, do you want to get together this afternoon?"

Harry brushed her off. "I've already arranged to do something with Draco."

Hermione's face fell a little. "That's alright. I'll see you in the library tomorrow after lessons then."

"I'll see you then." Harry turned his back on Hermione and, pulling Draco along with him, heading towards the Ravenclaw table.

"So what have we got arranged, Harry?" Draco wanted to know.

"I thought you might like to come down to the quidditch field and sit in on the practice. You can try out my broom if you want." Harry was still

angry with Hermione after their discussion the previous day and hadn't really wanted to speak to her at all.

Draco's face lit up. "That would be great."

The two then fell into a discussion about quidditch. When breakfast was finally over, they left the room together still engrossed in their discussion; Harry failed to notice Hermione's beseeching look as he walked past the Slytherin table. Hiding her tears, Hermione got up and headed back to her room.

That's it folks. As I said earlier, chapter 22 will follow shortly. Thanks for putting up with my obliterating the canon Potter world! Things are going to start getting closer to canon again after a few more chapters.

NOTE One of my reviewers pointed out that Harry wouldn't have used the diary after knowing about Draco using it. I just want to point out that Harry had no idea that the diary was evil. He even teased Pansy about it. Yes, he suspected it was Draco's, but he had no reason to think that it would be a bad idea to use it. Unfortunately, the diary's a little like some drugs; you use them once and then you're hooked. Draco only got rid of the diary because he was frightened. Even now, he still wishes he had it. Harry's in for a bumpy ride!

Chapter 22: Lily's Discovery

23rd November 1992

Lily picked up the Daily Prophet. The headline stood out in bold letters 'Another Student Attacked At Hogwarts'. Lily was a little concerned about Jamie being there, especially after the initial attack on Jamie's best friend, Ron. Putting the paper down, she made herself a cup of tea before returning to read the article in more detail.

'Another student was attacked two nights ago at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft & Wizardry. Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, said that every precaution was being taken to protect the children and that parents shouldn't worry. However, his words will bring little comfort to the parents of the two second year students who have been attacked so far, Gryffindor, Ronald Prewett, and Ravenclaw, Pansy Parkinson. Miss Parkinson had been preparing to take a walk with her boyfriend, fellow Ravenclaw, Harry Lupin, when she disappeared. She was later found by one of her teachers in an abandoned bathroom.'

Lily wondered if the boy in the report was related to Remus. She would have to ask Jamie. Forgetting about the report, she put the paper down and set about making lunch.

Narcissa chose that moment to stroll into the kitchen. "Come on, Lily, get your cloak. We're going out."

Lily looked up from chopping the tomatoes for her salad. "Where to?"

"I thought we might go into Hogsmeade." Narcissa suggested.

"Hogsmeade? Why on earth would we want to go there?" Lily questioned her friend.

Narcissa wouldn't meet her friend's eyes. "We've haven't been there in forever."

"There's more to it than that. Tell me now." Lily ordered.

“A new branch of the Paris bridal shop, Belle Mariée, has opened up there.” Narcissa blushed as she spoke.

“Okay, let’s do it.” Lily grinned. She knew that she and Narcissa would have fun trying on the different wedding gowns.

An hour later both women were standing in front of a mirror; Lily in a dress which could have passed for a meringue, and Narcissa in an ivory Shantung silk sheath.

Lily thought she was going to cry as she looked at her friend. “Oh, Narcy, you look amazing.”

“I think this might be the dress.” Narcissa smoothed the dress down with her left hand, her ruby and diamond engagement ring sparkling as it caught the light.

“I think you might be right.” Lily told her friend.

Narcissa turned to the sales assistant. “I’ll take it.”

Lily watched as Narcissa and the assistant discussed the dress. She had to admit to being a little jealous. Her first marriage had been a quiet affair, and she had worn a white suit to get married in. For her second marriage, she had ended up eloping and getting married in her jeans and tee-shirt.

Narcissa turned to her friend once she had paid for, and arranged delivery of the dress. “Let’s go to the Three Broomsticks. We need to celebrate.”

Lily was dragged out of the bridal store and into the pub she hadn’t been back to since she attended Hogwarts.

Narcissa steered Lily to a vacant table as Rosmerta walked over to greet them. “Well, I never. It’s been a long time since I saw your faces in here. What can I get you ladies?”

Narcissa looked at Lily before deciding for the both of them. “I think a bottle of your best champagne, please. Perhaps you’d like to join us.”

Rosmerta looked around. The pub was quite empty and so she decided that she wouldn't say no to a nice glass of bubbly, and hopefully a bit of gossip.

The three women chatted congenially for a while until Rosmerta got around to mentioning the family who had moved into Hogsmeade at the start of the school year. "I know you remember Remus, Lily."

Lily blushed. "I might."

Rosmerta laughed. The pair had spent most of their Hogsmeade weekends cuddled up together at a table drinking butterbeers. She had been surprised when Lily had ended things with Remus and taken up with James Potter. Shaking her head, she came back to the present.

"As I was saying, Remus moved his brood into Darcy Cottage at the end of August." Rosmerta still had a soft spot for Remus, even though she had been made very aware of his roving eye by a few of her girls.

"Brood?" Narcissa asked, sipping elegantly from her champagne flute.

"Yes. Now let me see, there's the two boys, Dudley and Harry. They're both at Hogwarts. He's also got three girls. Petunia, Remus' wife, often comes in with Grimstock Lovegood, her neighbor; they usually bring the girls in with them to say hello. Remus is a teacher now, at some muggle school in London. " Rosmerta was so caught up in her description she didn't notice that Lily had gone white.

Narcissa did and stood up. "It's been wonderful to catch up with you again, Rosmerta, but I'm afraid that Lily here has had a little too much to drink."

Rosmerta looked at Lily. "I think you're right. You'd better be off. I hope it won't be quite so long before I see you both again."

Narcissa smiled. "I hope so too." She then grabbed her friend by the arm and steered her towards the door.

Lily made it out of the door and staggered around to the side of the pub, where she fell to her knees and threw up violently. Narcissa kept her distance, knowing that Lily hated anyone watching her when she was being ill.

Once Lily had stopped vomiting, Narcissa pulled her friend to her feet. "Come on, let's go home. I'll side apparate you." Narcissa didn't trust Lily not to splice herself.

On arriving home, Narcissa headed for the drinks cabinet and poured out two glasses of cognac. She pushed one of the glasses into Lily's hand and downed the other herself.

Lily cast a scourgify and breath freshening spell on herself, and then, after sitting down, tossed off the drink; she then passed the glass back to Narcissa who refilled it for her.

Lily looked up at her friend. "I can't believe Remus married my sister."

"Are you sure Remus' wife is your sister?" Narcissa asked.

"No, but how many Petunias can there be who have a son called Dudley?" Lily pointed out.

"Probably not many, but it could still be a coincidence." Narcissa reasoned with her friend.

"Who knows? I thought Petunia might have told me though, if she was getting remarried to a wizard. Maybe it's because it's been so long since we were in touch; that she didn't know how I'd take it, especially as dropping all contact had been her decision." Lily didn't know what to think.

Narcissa already knew that Lily hadn't been in contact with her sister for quite some time. "You never really explained exactly what happened between you and your sister."

"She broke off all contact with me without any explanation. I wrote to her to tell her about Harry and James after I got out of the hospital.

The postman returned the letter unopened. I tried several more times after that; I even used owl post but with the same results. Dumbledore eventually persuaded me to let him go to see Petunia. He returned saying that her husband, Vernon, had found out about our earlier correspondence, and had made her stop writing. Dumbledore said that Vernon had threatened to leave Petunia and take their son, Dudley, with him if she stayed in touch with me. Understanding how it felt to lose a child, I stopped writing. I didn't want to be the cause of her losing her son." Lily hadn't really wanted to stop writing to her sister but, under the circumstances, she had felt that she had little choice except to abide by her sister's wishes.

"It must have been difficult for you to lose your sister's support, especially, after losing Harry and James." Narcissa sympathized with her friend.

"It was but at least I still had Jamie." The loss of her sister's support at the time had been devastating for Lily, but she had learned to live without it.

"Well, it doesn't look as if your sister suffered too much. Not only did she get to keep Dudley but it looks as if she got Remus' son, Harry as well." Narcissa sounded disgusted.

"Harry can't be Remus' son; he must have adopted him." Lily spoke without thinking.

"And how do you know that he can't be Remus' son?" Narcissa asked.

Lily wondered if she should tell Narcissa about Remus' condition. "I just know."

"You don't get away with saying that 'you just know'. Come on, tell me." Narcissa demanded.

Taking a deep breath, Lily told her friend about Remus' condition. "He's a werewolf. They can only sire girls."

Narcissa's jaw dropped. "Well, I never saw that coming."

"Most people don't know." Lily told her.

"Don't worry; I won't discuss this with anyone else." Narcissa was still a little shocked.

Lily began pacing. "I can't believe Remus didn't tell me about Petunia when I saw him last month."

Narcissa was again surprised by her friend. "You saw him last month?"

"He dropped by out of the blue. I was really pleased to see him and invited him in. We were having a friendly conversation when he suddenly turned on me and accused me of giving up on Harry. I told him to get out and never come back." Lily still couldn't believe how the conversation had turned from being sociable to antagonistic without warning.

"I wonder why he called his son Harry." Narcissa pondered.

Lily thought for a moment before answering. "Remus' was Harry's godfather. Remus absolutely adored him. Perhaps when Remus adopted his son he named him in memory of his godson."

"Well, he always was a nice guy. I still can't believe you dumped him for James Potter though." Narcissa didn't realize that she was echoing Madam Rosmerta's earlier thoughts.

"I didn't just dump him; I had a good reason for my actions." Lily defended herself.

Narcissa merely looked at her.

"Do you remember me telling you about the incident with Severus where he called me a mudblood?" Lily cringed as she remembered her former friend's verbal attack on her.

"Of course I do." Narcissa had had to practically force the story out of Lily as to why she and Severus were no longer friends.

"I split up with Remus because he witnessed the whole thing, and he never once stood up for me, or for Severus. I couldn't stay with him when he wasn't willing to defend someone who was put in as defenseless a position as Severus was." Lily told Narcissa.

"But you defended Severus and look how vile he was to you." Narcissa protested.

"It doesn't matter what Severus did to me. It was what Remus failed to do. He was a prefect as well as my boyfriend. He should have done something to stop James and Sirius from tormenting Severus." Lily argued.

"But you started seeing James not long after you split up from Remus." Even now, Narcissa couldn't understand why Lily had turned to the Gryffindor.

"He came to me and apologized for his behavior. He wouldn't let me tell anyone, but he also went to Severus and apologized to him as well. After he told me, we went for a walk, and things just went from there." Lily looked a little wistful as she thought about her first husband.

"I'm glad you were happy with James, and I'm sorry for criticizing you about what happened between you and Remus." Narcissa felt bad for forcing Lily to defend herself.

"That happened so long ago, it's hardly worth getting upset over now." Lily brushed off Narcissa's concern. "I'm now more interested in finding out whether or not Remus is married to my sister."

Narcissa shook her head. "You do know it's going to be a coincidence, don't you? I mean, if Dumbledore went and saw your sister, and she was still married to Vernon, how could it be her? That could also be why Remus didn't mention being married to your sister when you saw him last month."

"I know you're probably right but I won't be able to rest until I find out for definite." Lily responded.

"Why don't we get Sirius to do some digging?" Narcissa suggested.

Lily shook her head. "You know how Sirius feels about Remus."

"You'd think that he would have gotten over that by now." Narcissa couldn't believe that Sirius still hadn't forgiven his old school friend.

"It's a little difficult to forget that you found your supposed best friend in bed with your fiancée!" Lily pointed out.

"True. I wouldn't be too happy if it had happened to me." Narcissa looked down at her engagement ring as she spoke.

"Exactly. Anyway, I have a better idea. I'll write to Jamie and see what he can find out. I read a report in the Prophet this morning mentioning a Harry Lupin." Lily picked up the paper. "Here it is. Apparently he's a Ravenclaw."

Narcissa had an idea. "Why don't I write to Draco? Being in Ravenclaw, he's bound to know Harry Lupin."

Lily looked at the time and squealed. "I'd better get changed. I've got to pick the kids up from school in less than ten minutes."

Narcissa apparated out, as Lily disappeared towards her bedroom.

Two days later

Lily was eating breakfast when she heard a tapping on the window and, after seeing her daughter's owl hovering outside, she opened it to let Caspian in. Cassie had named him after reading a book by the muggle author, C.S. Lewis. Taking the letter from Caspian's leg, she absently passed him a piece of bacon. She had just been about to open the letter, when the fireplace flared up and Narcissa appeared.

"Lily, I've received a response from Draco." Narcissa got straight to the point of her visit.

Lily held up the letter she hadn't opened yet from Jamie. "I've got Jamie's here. I haven't read it yet."

Narcissa watched as Lily opened, and then read the letter.

"Dear Mum

Thanks for the letter. I'm doing okay. Ron is also okay, I think. I go up a few times a week with Ron's girlfriend, Lavender Brown, to see him. Lavender sometimes brings her friend, Parvati, as well. Madam Pomfrey said that Ron can't hear me, but I still like to talk to him. I've never once seen his skanky sister, Ginny, come and visit him. His Mum comes once a week, so there's always plenty of fudge. She keeps on making it for Ron, even though she knows the mandrakes for the healing potion won't be ready until May next year.

Now that Ron is out of action, I've been making other friends including a couple of first years, Colin Creevey and Miranda Bailey. Don't get worrying about what is happening here too much. We have to go around in groups now, and curfew has been changed to seven o'clock.

I don't know why you wanted to know about Harry Lupin. He's a really boring, goody two shoes who hangs around with Snivellus' daughter, and her Slytherin friend. He and his brother, Dudley are both second years and on the Ravenclaw quidditch team. I don't know how they managed to get on the team as they both suck at quidditch. I couldn't find out much about his parents, (I asked Parvati, who asked her sister Padma, who is in Lupin's House) except that they live in Hogsmeade, and his Dad is a teacher.

I'm still seeing Cho. I was hoping to invite her over for Christmas Day but she is going to visit her grandmother in Hong Kong that day. I think Christmas will be pretty quiet unless you invite the Blacks over. Perhaps we might be lucky and Draco will have to go visit his aunt in France this year. Anyway, Cho said that if her parents agree, she can come the day after Boxing Day and stay until it is time to go back to school.

I really miss everyone. Tell Dad I love him.

See you at Christmas.

Love

Jamie

P.S. Can you send me some more chocolate chip cookies please?"

Lily sometimes wished her son would be a little less unpleasant about other people. He was supposed to be setting example as the Boy Who Lived. Shaking her head, Lily showed the letter to Narcissa. "Sorry about his nasty comment about Draco. I really wish that the two of them could get along. Anyway, the letter doesn't really contain anything we don't already know, so I still don't have any idea whether my sister is Remus' wife or not."

"This might shed some light on things for you." Narcissa passed over her own son's letter and waited for the outburst.

"Dear Mother

Thank you for your letter. I really miss everyone. Tell Cassie I'm looking forward to seeing her when I get back from Hogwarts.

It is a little scary being here at the moment with everything that has happened, but I'm trying not to let it get in the way of my schoolwork. I was upset about Pansy but it is Harry, the boy you asked about, who feels the worst about it. He'd been about to go for a walk with her, when she left him alone for a moment and never came back. He feels responsible for not going with her.

I told Harry that you had asked about him and Dudley. He did wonder why but I explained that you were Pansy's godmother, and had heard about what had happened to her. I also said that you knew his father. Harry said to tell you that he is sorry about Pansy.

Harry also said to tell you that he's got a brother, Dudley, and three sisters, Scarlett-Rose, Aurilia and Georgiana. The last two are twins. His mother is called Petunia and used to be married to a muggle, who

was Dudley's father. Remus, Harry's father, adopted Dudley when he married Petunia. Harry was adopted as a baby by Remus and Petunia, just after they got married.

Harry's father is living in London where he teaches, and his mother lives in Hogsmeade with his sisters. Harry and Dudley are both in my house and they're both on the quidditch team.

Speaking of the quidditch team, Harry let me use his broom on Sunday. It turns out that I might be good at chasing. If I am, perhaps I could borrow Uncle Sirius' broom to ride on during the Christmas holiday.

I'm so glad Christmas is nearly here. I can't wait to see everyone again.

Your loving son,

Draco"

After reading Draco's letter, Narcissa had been glad that her son seemed to be improving after his mysterious illness. She had spent several nights at his bedside, with both Severus, and Filius Flitwick in attendance. Sirius had eventually arrived one morning, and sent her home to get some sleep. It was not long after Sirius' visit that Draco had woken up, thereby negating Narcissa's need to be at Hogwarts.

"Well, what do you think?" Narcissa knew that the evidence presented by Draco strongly suggested that Petunia was, indeed, married to Remus.

"I knew it." Lily said. "It has to be my sister. I'm going to see her right now and have it out with her."

Lily jumped up from her seat, only for Narcissa to push her back down. "You can't do that. She has three children at home. How would you feel if it was you?"

Lily subsided, and then jumped up again. "In that case I'm going to see Remus and have it out with him then."

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Narcissa hid the slight smile that threatened to grace her face.

“What?” Lily looked. She had her wand and cloak. What else did she need?

“Remus’ address?”

“Damn.” Lily sat back down.

“Why don’t we write to Remus?” Narcissa suggested.

“I threw him out the last time he was here. He’ll probably just ignore anything I write.” Lily pointed out.

Narcissa waved a hand dismissively through the air. “Then I’ll write him a letter and ask to see him.”

Lily called to Caspian, who obediently sat and waited while Narcissa penned a missive to Remus.

“Dear Mr. Lupin

You may remember me from our time at Hogwarts. I have something of great importance that I need to discuss with you. I was wondering if you could meet me at a venue of your choice this Saturday.

Sincerely

Narcissa Black”

Caspian waited for Narcissa to tie the letter to his leg and took off.

Narcissa turned to Lily. “Now we wait.”

Later that evening

Remus opened the door to his apartment and yawned. He’d had an especially bad day with his students being more disruptive than usual.

A tapping sound at the window alerted him to the fact that an owl was trying to get in. Remus opened the window and allowed the owl access to his apartment. After taking the letter from its leg, Remus fed the owl a couple of treats. It didn't take flight, so Remus assumed that it was waiting for an answer. Opening the letter, Remus read its brief missive, before penning a response, and giving it to the owl.

"Dear Ms. Black

Thank you for your letter. We can meet here at my apartment. It is 223B Baker Street. I will see you at 3.30pm.

Sincerely

Remus Lupin"

Narcissa had returned home after writing to Remus. She had been eating dinner when Midge, her house elf, brought her a letter. Upon opening it, she discovered it was from Remus. Smiling, she dismissed the elf and finished eating her meal.

28th November 1992

Lily was a bag of nerves as she and Narcissa apparated as close as possible to Baker Street. As nervous as she was, Lily knew that she wouldn't rest until she found out why her sister had married Remus, and why she hadn't bothered to tell her.

Walking up to the door, Lily pressed the button next to the little card that was marked 'Lupin'.

Remus' voice came through the intercom. "Who is it?"

Lily looked pointedly at Narcissa who moved to speak into the metal grill. "It's Narcissa Black."

"Come on up." Remus' disembodied voice invited.

A buzzing noise sounded and Lily pulled open the door to the apartments. After entering the foyer, Lily discovered that 223B was

on the second floor. Both women looked at the rickety old elevator, and headed for the staircase. When they arrived outside Remus' apartment, they found the door ajar. Lily tapped lightly on it.

"Come on in, the door's open." Remus called out.

Narcissa entered first with Lily following close behind her. "Mr. Lupin, thank you for agreeing to see me."

Remus noticed Lily. "You didn't mention anything about bringing her."

"You didn't ask." Narcissa responded dryly.

Remus walked behind the women and closed the door. Curious, Remus decided to let things play out. Being a genial host, he offered Lily and Narcissa somewhere to sit and then served them both drinks.

"So, ladies, what can I do for you?" Remus inquired.

"Tell me, Mr. Lupin, how have you been since school?" Narcissa inquired, observing the social niceties.

"Things have been going well, thank you, and please call me Remus, Ms Black." Remus responded, waiting for Narcissa to get to the real reason why she was here.

"Then you must call me Narcissa, Remus. As you no doubt heard, I divorced Lucius Malfoy. Our son, Draco, is in Ravenclaw. Do you have any children of your own?" Narcissa smiled sweetly.

"I have two sons, Harry and Dudley. I believe they're your son's roommates in Ravenclaw. I also have three daughters who live with my wife." Remus didn't bother giving Narcissa his daughters' names.

"I did notice that you appear to live on your own. Are you divorced?" Narcissa now started to step outside the bounds of polite conversation.

Remus shook his head. "No, I'm not. I only live here during the school term. I have a supply teaching job and it is easier to live on location."

Narcissa finally went for the jugular. "Tell me, Remus, did you marry Lily's sister?"

Remus just nodded. He'd had a feeling that Narcissa had been steering the conversation towards Lily's sister, once she had started asking about his children.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Lily spoke for the first time.

"You know why." Remus responded.

"I'm sorry but I don't. I know Petunia broke off all contact with me because of Vernon, but it would have been nice to have been told about you and her." Lily sounded hurt. "How long have you been married?"

"Almost ten years." Remus spoke quietly.

"When exactly did you get married?" Lily inquired.

"January 1982." It was a date Remus would have preferred to forget about.

Lily was surprised. Dumbledore had visited her sister after Remus and Petunia had gotten married. Why had Dumbledore lied to her? "What about her husband?"

"She divorced him obviously." Remus' tone was sarcastic as he responded to Lily's question.

Lily wondered when Petunia had divorced Vernon. "When did she get divorced?"

"January 1982." Remus responded.

"So exactly how long after Petunia's divorce did you get married?" Lily couldn't believe that her sister, who was a stickler for propriety, would get married so quickly after her divorce.

“One week.” Remus knew Lily would jump to the wrong conclusion.

“You were in a hurry.” Lily observed. “Was she pregnant?”

“No, she was not.” Remus replied curtly.

“Sorry.” Lily didn’t actually look sorry at all, and pushed on with her questioning. “So how long had you been dating before you got married?”

Remus had intended to just tell Lily to mind her own business but, after listening to her disdainful tone, he decided to shock her instead. “If you include the week after Nia’s divorce, that would be two weeks. Not that it’s any of your business.”

“Two weeks; two bloody short weeks, and you got married?” Lily’s voice rose several octaves.

Remus turned on her. “You can hardly throw stones. James hadn’t been dead for little more than six months when you got remarried.”

The next thing Remus knew, Lily had shot to her feet, her hand connecting soundly with his cheek. “You bastard. You don’t know anything it. How dare you judge me?”

“Me judge you? You’re the one who was berating me for marrying your sister after just two weeks.” Remus pointed out.

“But two weeks, and why my sister, Remus? Why?” Lily needed to know.

“As if you don’t know.” Remus stormed over to the drinks cabinet and sloshed some more scotch into his glass. “I think it would be best if you left now.”

Neither of them noticed that Narcissa had already apparated out of the apartment.

Knowing she wasn’t going to get anything more out of Remus, Lily headed towards the front door. As she did so, she spotted an

arrangement of framed photographs that covered a sideboard to the left of the door. Remus watched silently as she changed direction and stepped over to examine the photographs.

Lily picked up the closest photograph to her, it was of her son, Harry, and she touched it gently. Still holding onto Harry's picture, she looked at the other photographs lined up on the sideboard. Seconds later Harry's picture crashed to the ground as Lily backed away from the sideboard. She spun round to confront Remus, her face white.

"Is this some of kind of a sick joke?" Lily's hand knocked several of the photos over, as she indicated the numerous pictures Remus had of his children.

"I don't know what you mean." Remus none too gently pushed Lily aside and picked Harry's picture up off the floor, before setting it back on the sideboard with the others.

"Where did you find him, Remus? Did you visit all the orphanages looking for someone who resembled him?" Lily couldn't believe what Harry's godfather had done. "I missed my son more than anyone, but I never would have gone looking for some clone to replace him. You disgust me. Harry's gone, for God's sake, he gone."

Her last words coming out as a scream, Lily swept her arm across the photographs, sending them flying onto the floor.

Remus angrily grabbed Lily by the top of her arms and shook her. "Oh, come on Lily. Don't act as if you don't know. Dumbledore told us that you didn't want Harry any more."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Tears spilled from the corners of Lily's eyes as Remus' actions grew more violent with every word.

"Of course you don't. Just like you don't know why I married your bloody sister." Remus was shouting now; his anger at Lily's pretence starting to overwhelm him.

Lily was now more than a little frightened; Remus' eyes had changed to the vivid amber of the werewolf. She knew what Remus was capable of and, that even in his untransformed state, he would have no problem ripping her to pieces with his bare hands if he was pushed far enough.

Speaking in a soft but shaky voice, Lily appealed to Remus. "Please, let me show you something."

Remus let go of her and she lifted her trembling hands to her neck and unclipped her locket, which she opened and passed to him.

Remus knew how close he had come to seriously hurting Lily but he didn't care. Reaching out he snatched the locket from her hand. Inside the locket was a lock of black hair and a baby picture; he recognized it immediately. It was Harry. He was confused. "Why are you showing me this?"

Lily filled Remus in. "When I woke up in the hospital, Dumbledore told me that James and Harry hadn't made it; that Voldemort himself had killed my son. He lied though, didn't he?"

Remus shook his head. Lily must have thought him a really soft touch if she had expected him to believe that. "Nice try. You don't really expect me to believe you just because you have a locket with a piece of hair and a baby picture in it?"

Lily started to draw her wand, and Remus growled softly in the back of his throat, prompting her to come to a halt. "Look, take out your own wand and hold it over me if it makes you feel better."

Remus did exactly that and watched as Lily lifted her wand to her heart. "I swear on my magic and my life that I believed my son Harry to be dead until today."

A white shining light swirled around Lily and settled over her, before disappearing.

Remus watched as the light from Lily's wand dispersed. The fact that she was alive could only mean one thing; she was telling the truth.

Remus was horrified. He'd known from experience that Dumbledore was manipulative, but to find out that the man had gone so far as to steal someone's baby, sickened him beyond belief. "Lily, I'm so, so sorry; I had no idea that you thought that Harry was dead. We were told you didn't want him."

At Remus' confirmation that her son really was still alive, Lily collapsed to the floor and began to keen softly. "My baby, oh God, my baby."

Remus dropped to the floor beside Lily and pulled her into his arms, gently rocking her as she began to cry, harsh, choking sobs, almost leaving her unable to breathe. Eventually though, she quieted down and lifted her tearstained face to look at Remus. "How could he?"

"I don't know, Lily." Remus gently stroked her hair as she looked at him.

At that moment a tapping on the window interrupted the pair. It was only then that they realized Narcissa was no longer there. Remus recognized the owl as the one that had brought Narcissa's letter earlier that week.

"It's my daughter's owl, Caspian." Lily explained. Remus pulled the letter off the owl's leg and passed it to Lily, who opened it. "It's from Narcissa."

"Lily

I knew you would do just fine without me, so I left. I've taken the children home with me as Craig and Sirius are going for a boys' night out. I told them that we bumped into an old FEMALE school friend from your time before Hogwarts, and that the two of you had decided to go out together to catch up on old times. Don't worry if you want to go and see your sister and don't get home tonight, the boys will be too drunk to notice anyway. I hope everything works out for you.

I'll see you tomorrow.

Love

Narcy x”

“Narcy?” Remus couldn’t imagine the staid and proper Narcissa Black calling herself Narcy.

“Cassie couldn’t pronounce her name properly when she was little so Narcissa ended up being Narcy.” Lily smiled through her tears at the memory of her daughter’s attempts to pronounce her friend’s name properly.

Lily’s stomach suddenly rumbled, and she covered it with her hand, looking embarrassed.

Remus smiled softly at her. “Are you hungry?”

Lily was surprised that she actually felt ravenous. “Actually I am.”

“I’ll be back in about half an hour.” Remus disappeared.

With Remus was gone, Lily poured herself another glass of wine and looked around. Going over to the sideboard she picked up the photos she had knocked over. Looking through them she frowned. Even though Remus had pictures of all his children, there were none of her sister. Lily turned her attention to the remainder of the apartment, which was comfortably furnished with beige and wood-trimmed sofas. A small dining table was set up against the kitchen wall; at the moment it was covered with papers and Remus’ lap-top. Opening one of the two doors that faced the living room, Lily found a small bedroom with a double bed and a side table in it. Not wanting to intrude, she quickly closed it and checked out the other door. It was a small but functional bathroom. Deciding to make use of it whilst Remus was out, Lily went in and closed the door.

Fifteen minutes later, a pop signaled Remus’ return. In one hand he had two plastic bags containing boxes which, judging from the delicious smells coming from them, contained their dinner. In his other hand he had another plastic bag; this one containing a selection of wines.

Remus placed a towel on the floor and laid out the food boxes. Lily opened one to discover her favorite, sweet & sour chicken. She almost moaned in delight. Grabbing a fork, Lily dug into the food. Her appetite had been practically non-existent for the last few days worrying about her sister and Remus. Now that she had the answer to her question, and had discovered Harry hadn't been killed by Voldemort, her appetite had returned with a vengeance. Remus opened several other boxes and, copying Lily, dug in with some relish.

After they had finished eating, Remus reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny box. After enlarging it, he handed it to Lily. The top of the box was marked 'Harry'.

With trembling hands, Lily lifted the lid. Just inside lay a photo album. Opening it, Lily looked through it as Remus pointed out various milestones in her son's life; when he started school; his first tooth, which was sellotaped to the album next to a picture of Harry grinning widely, a gap showing between his front teeth; his first swimming lesson; Harry sitting with Dudley and his baby sisters lying between them.

Lily didn't bother to stop her tears falling as she looked through the album. Most of the pictures were muggle, but the last one, one of Harry dressed in his Hogwarts robes, was a wizarding photo. He beamed happily into the camera, while waving. Lily frowned and put the album down.

"What's wrong?" Remus asked.

"Harry's eyes should be green. Why are they blue in most of the pictures?" Lily asked.

Remus laughed. "Harry wears colored contacts. He found out that his nanny, Johanna, wore blue contact lenses. He begged and begged us to let him have some. He doesn't know that we realized exactly why he wanted that color; that he had a serious crush on Johanna."

Lily laughed at Remus' tale of her son's first crush. Remus then shared some other stories from Harry's childhood as Lily listened eagerly. Remus eventually fell silent. "I expect you want to see him."

“Of course I do. He’s my son.” Lily exclaimed. A thought then crossed her mind. “What did you tell him about James and me?”

“We told him that his parents loved him but we didn’t tell him any more than that. ” Remus told her.

“Thank you.” Lily was relieved that Remus and Petunia hadn’t let their mistaken anger at her, taint her son’s memories of her and James.

Remus smiled. “We can discuss what to do about Harry when we’ve both spoken to our respective families.”

As much as Lily was anxious to see Harry now, she understood that it would take time. Remus was going to have to explain to his wife that her sister hadn’t actually abandoned her son, and he was going to have to tell Harry that his mother still wanted him after all.

Remus decided that a change of subject was in order. “Now, why don’t we have another glass of wine, and you can tell me how you managed to end up getting married so quickly after James’ death.”

Seeing Lily’s face harden at his request, Remus held up his hands. “I’m not judging you, Lily. I just want to know what happened.”

Lily doubted Remus’ statement. “You’re really interested?”

“Honestly, yes, I am. Now get on with it.” Remus refilled Lily’s wine glass.

Lily started to tell Remus what had happened to her after she had been released from hospital.

24th February 1982

A knock at the door disturbed Lily from her stupor. Checking that Jamie was still sleeping, she opened the door to find her husband’s best friend standing there.

She threw her arms around him. “Oh my God, Sirius. I can’t believe it. It’s so good to see you. I couldn’t believe it when they told me that you had joined Voldemort.”

Wrapping his arms around Lily, Sirius barked his trademark laugh. “Yeah, you know me, deatheater extraordinaire!”

“I was horrified to find out that you’d been thrown into Azkaban. How could they believe that you would give us up like that?” Lily hugged Sirius hard.

“Perhaps the fact that you had originally planned to use me as your secret-keeper had something to do with it.” Sirius pointed out.

Lily looked guilty, and Sirius hurried to reassure her. “Look, I’m fine now. Let’s forget about it.”

Sirius had disappeared almost two weeks before the attack on the Potters. Rumors of his joining Voldemort had rapidly surfaced. Sirius had then turned up almost a week later, dazed and half dead. The worst of his injuries had been healed and, with everyone believing he had been the Potters’ secret-keeper, he’d been thrown into Azkaban without a trial. Nobody had listened when Sirius had screamed that he had been taken by deatheaters, and that he hadn’t been the Potters’ secret-keeper. He’d remained in Azkaban until Lily had woken up and repudiated the claims. Sirius had then been taken to St. Mungo’s suffering from malnutrition and complications from the injuries that had been left unhealed when he was thrown into Azkaban. The real secret-keeper was now in Sirius’ place in Azkaban.

After hugging Sirius once more, Lily let him go and drew him into her apartment sitting room. “How did you find me?”

“I dropped by to see Alice Longbottom and her new baby. I understand she’s your secret-keeper for this place.”

“Yes, I needed someone I could trust after last time.”

The thought of the death and destruction wrought on Godric’s Hollow caused them both to fall silent for a moment.

Spotting Jamie in his crib, Sirius walked over to look at his godson. "He's still got a cut on his head. Why hasn't it been healed?" Sirius drew his wand, only for Lily to stay his hand.

"The healers say it's a curse scar and can't be healed. Apart from that he's okay now, but it took some time; apparently he was pretty bruised and battered from the whole thing." Lily's eyes filled with tears as she looked down at her precious son.

Still standing by the crib, Sirius turned to Lily, "So, do you get many visitors?"

"Not really. I haven't told anyone where to find me except for Alice, Albus, my healer, and Poppy Pomfrey. Poppy's been wonderful. With Alice being so busy with the new baby, Poppy's been coming over every day to check on us both. Craig, my healer, sees me once or twice a week." Lily smiled as Sirius stepped away from looking at Jamie and turned to face her.

"Do you remember anything about what happened that night?" Sirius asked, keeping his eyes firmly on Lily's face.

"Not much. I remember James yelling that the wards had gone down and to grab the children..." Here Lily faltered.

"I'm sorry, Lily. It's too soon to be asking you about that night." Sirius looked contrite.

"No, it's okay. I can't keep avoiding the subject. As I was saying, James told me to get the children and get out, but I didn't have enough time. Suddenly, Voldemort was coming through the bedroom door. There was a flash, and some pain and the next thing I remember, I was waking up two months later in St. Mungo's." Lily now had tears running down her face.

Sirius stepped over to Lily and drew her into the comforting circle of his embrace. "Shh. I'll take good care of you now. I'm just sorry I couldn't be there for you before."

“Oh Sirius. I’ve really missed you.” Lily sobbed.

“Hey, what are friends for, if they can’t provide a shoulder to soak and, from the smell coming from the direction of your son, a change of diaper or two.” Sirius tried to make his voice light.

Lily laughed and lifted her head out from the comfort of Sirius’s shoulder. He was right; Jamie needed changing. “I’ll get him. I don’t expect you to change his diaper; I had trouble getting James to do it, and he was his Dad.”

Lily leaned into the crib and lifted out her son. He seemed to be getting heavier by the day. Her burden was removed as Sirius reached over and took his godson from her. He then walked over to the changing table and quickly dealt with Jamie’s sticky problem. Sirius then popped Jamie back in his crib and looked down at the hazel eyed boy who looked right back at him before yawning and closing his eyes.

“When did you get out of hospital?” Lily asked.

“About two weeks ago.” Sirius had needed even longer to recover than Lily had. The healers had kept Sirius in the psychiatric section of hospital until they had been certain that all of the issues arising from the mental torture Voldemort and his death eaters had inflicted upon him, had been resolved.

“I’m sorry that I didn’t come and see you.” Lily sounded guilty.

Sirius kept one hand on the crib as he responded. “It’s okay. I understand. I went to see Alice as soon as I was released. She said that you still needed some time to recover, and that I should give you some space until you felt up to seeing people again.”

“She’s right. I couldn’t face seeing anyone. I felt like a failure.” Lily looked down at the floor.

Sirius lifted his hand to chuck Lily under her chin. “Hey, you are not a failure. It’s not like you were going up against a green wizard; that was the Dark Lord you were up against.”

Lily frowned. "Dark Lord? I've never heard you call Voldemort that before."

"Why don't we sit down?" Sirius said, heading for the sofa.

"Let me get you a drink. Firewhiskey?" Lily asked.

"Please."

Lily poured herself a white wine and filled a tumbler with firewhiskey for Sirius, which she passed to him, before sitting down.

Taking a large gulp of the fiery liquid, Sirius started to tell Lily about what happened when he was captured by Voldemort. "As you know, I was held by deatheaters for almost three weeks. I thought I would never get out. While I was there they tried to get me to join the Dark... sorry, Voldemort. They just kept tormenting me. If I behaved, I was rewarded. If I refused to do as they said, I was punished. I eventually got to the point where I was ready to agree to anything, even joining Voldemort, just so that they would leave me alone."

Lily held Sirius' hand as he spoke. "How did you escape?"

Sirius shook his head. "I don't really know. I just remember falling down some steps and trying to apparate. The next thing I knew I was lying in Knockturn Alley. Some kind passerby alerted the Aurors and, before I knew it, I had been accused of betraying you all and thrown into Azkaban. Even with my mind healer's help, I still occasionally slip and end up calling Voldemort, the Dark Lord."

"Oh Sirius. I never knew it was that bad." Lily was horrified.

"It's okay, Lily. I'm fine now." Sirius smiled. "It takes more than a few deatheaters to put this dog down."

"What have you been doing since you got out?" Lily tried to guide the conversation back into a more pleasant arena.

“After I was released from St. Mungo’s, I headed home to Black Manor and who should I find there but Narcissa and her son. Apparently she’d been having some problems with Lucius and had divorced him. She asked if she could retake the Black name and change her son’s as well. She also wanted to know if she could stay on the Black Estate. Of course I said yes to everything.” Sirius had been glad that Narcissa had left Lucius and had been more than willing to aid his cousin in achieving her goals.

“I can’t believe she divorced him. I always thought that marrying a rich man had been Narcissa’s goal in life.” Lily shuddered. She couldn’t stand Lucius Malfoy, who had made several sexual approaches to her on more than one occasion. “Did he finally cheat on her then?”

Sirius shook his head. “I’m surprised you haven’t heard about it already, but Narcissa found out that Lucius was a deatheater. I don’t think she would have left him just for that though. I think the nail in coffin for their marriage was Narcissa finding out that Lucius had been there when you were attacked.”

“Oh.” Lily didn’t know what to say.

“I’m sorry; I’m bringing the conversation down.” Sirius looked over to where his godson was now sleeping. “I know, why don’t I bring Draco over here one day to play with Jamie. I can see them becoming the best of friends.”

Distracted, Lily laughed. “You mean you’ll bring him over here when you’ve had enough of playing Uncle Sirius and you need someone to dump your nephew on!”

Sirius smiled ruefully “Yep, his dirty diapers and all.”

Lily yawned. She hadn’t been sleeping well and the glass of wine had made her drowsy.

“I think I’d better be off.” Sirius put down his glass and got to his feet.

“Thanks for coming to see me. Now you know where we are, there’s no excuse for you not to see your godson more often.” Lily also got up and hugged Sirius before releasing him.

“I’ll drop by in a couple of days.”

Lily let Sirius out of her apartment and closed the door behind him.

Over the next few months, Sirius became a frequent visitor, buoying Lily up when she felt down. She didn’t know what she would have done without his visits.

25th April 1982

Lily got up from the dining table to get the front door. She turned to her dinner guest. “Please excuse me.”

She got to the front door to find Sirius standing there with a bottle of champagne. “Sirius, I wasn’t expecting you.”

Gently pushing past Lily, Sirius entered her apartment only to come to a stop when he saw the tall, black-haired man sitting at Lily’s table, looking at home with his legs stretched out in front of him.

Lily shut the door and walked back to the dinner table. “Sirius, this is Craig Delaney. He’s the healer at St. Mungo’s I told you about. Craig, this is Sirius Black.”

The two men shook hands, and Lily turned to Sirius. “Would you like to join us for dinner? There’s plenty of food.”

Sirius put down the bottle he was carrying. “If you don’t mind, I’d love to. I’ve been sitting tests all day long and I’m starving.”

Lily got up and walked towards the kitchen to fetch another plate and some more flatware. Her voice drifted back into the dining room. “Oh Sirius, I’m so pleased you’re going to continue with the auror program.”

Coming back into the room, she laid an extra setting at the table and sat down. Sirius filled his plate and tucked in. He hadn't been lying about being hungry; he hadn't had time to eat all day. He didn't bother mentioning that he hadn't been doing tests for the auror program.

"I'm glad to see you have fully recovered, Lord Black." Craig Delaney said, smiling at Sirius. "I was part of the team who worked on you when they brought you in from Azkaban."

Sirius stopped eating. "Two things; one, please call me Sirius and two, I'd rather not discuss Azkaban."

Craig looked uncomfortable. "I'm sorry to bring up bad memories. It was inconsiderate of me."

At that moment, the fireplace in Lily's apartment chimed three times to let her know she had someone waiting to speak to her. She quickly got up and accepted the floo call. "Alice, I didn't know you were back at work yet."

Alice Longbottom's head floated in the fireplace, her healer's badge visible in her hair. Alice had never been one for convention and used it to hold back her hair out of her eyes. "Yes, I started back last night. Sorry this isn't a social call. We need Craig back urgently."

Craig stood up. Sirius had been right about his assessment, the guy was tall. "Alice, what's up?"

"There's been a large explosion and we're expecting multiple casualties. We need you back at once. Lily, Sirius." With that, her head disappeared from the fireplace.

Craig turned to Lily and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm sorry. I've got to go. Do you mind if I use your fireplace?"

"Not at all. I'll see you next week then?" Lily smiled softly up at Craig.

"I'll be here." With that Craig stepped into the fireplace and disappeared in a flash of green flames.

Lily had had her fireplace hooked up to the floo network since she first moved into the apartment. Even though anyone could floo out, only people who had been let in on the secret of where she lived, could floo in. Even then, Lily had the choice of refusing them entry.

Lily turned back to Sirius, who by now was taking seconds of everything. "I'm so glad you've had the chance to meet Craig. He was a great help during my recovery."

"I bet he was." Sirius sounded short.

"Is something wrong?" Lily was surprised at Sirius' tone.

"I'm sorry. I'm just really tired. I didn't expect the tests to be so grueling. I was hoping we could just relax together over a bottle of wine. I was surprised to find someone here." Sirius looked like a kicked puppy to Lily.

"I'll tell you what. I've got an apple pie in the oven and a bottle of champagne already chilling. I'll serve them in the sitting room."

Sirius sat down on the sofa to think while Lily fetched the pie and champagne. He wondered how often Craig had been here for dinner before. Not wanting to upset Lily though, he didn't say anything to her.

"Would you like ice-cream with your pie?" Lily called from the kitchen.

"No, thanks. Pie on its own is just fine for me." Sirius called back.

A few minutes later, Lily entered the living room bearing a tray with the champagne, two flutes and two plates of apple pie on it. Sirius jumped up and took the tray from her, placing it on the small coffee table in front of the sofa.

Silence prevailed as they both ate their pie, lost in their own thoughts.

Pouring the champagne, Lily turned to Sirius. "Let's make a toast."

Sirius accepted the glass from her. "I think the lady should choose what we're drinking to."

Lily thought for a moment. "To new beginnings and old friendships."

Sirius raised his glass and sipped. The champagne was good, but not in the same league as the one he had brought with him.

"How about a movie?" Lily asked.

Sirius didn't need asking twice. "That would be great. You can pick."

Sirius loved the TV Lily had had installed in the apartment. After she had recovered, Lily had moved into Potter Place, the ancestral Potter home. Before two weeks had gone by, Lily had decided that she found living in the oversized house oppressive and promptly moved into an apartment in a muggle area. She hadn't been able to face having the cozy home she had once lived in at Godric's Hollow repaired, as it would have brought back too many bad memories for her. With the apartment being in a muggle area, she was able to have all the modern conveniences of a muggle home including the TV. Luckily, the fidelius charm didn't affect them.

Lily moved over to her bookcase and picked out a tape, which she slid into the machine. Knowing Sirius liked romantic movies, a fact that James had often teased him about, she had picked Casablanca. Turning down the lights, they sat together in the dark watching Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman light up the screen. As the credits rolled, Lily could hear Sirius' sniffles. She smiled to herself in the dark and left the room to give him a few moments to pull himself together.

On her return, Lily found that Sirius had opened the bottle of champagne he had brought with him. The bottle was twice the size of the one that Craig had popped into her fridge.

Sirius grinned up at her and held out her glass, which she gratefully took. "Sorry, the ending always gets to me. I always live in hope that it's changed and Ilsa stays with Rick. She never does."

Lily just laughed. "Don't ever change. No-one makes me laugh quite like you do."

Changing tack, Lily slid a comedy into the VCR and the pair laughed until they cried at the antics of the actors in the movie. By the time the movie ended, the pair had finished Sirius' bottle of champagne and were more than a little drunk. Lily tried to stand up and fell on top of Sirius.

"Whoops, I think I've had a little too much to drink." Lily giggled as she rolled away from Sirius and onto the floor.

Sirius stood up slightly unsteadily and pulled Lily to her feet. "I think you should be heading for bed."

Lily tried to walk to her room and cannoned into the sofa. She looked pitifully at Sirius. "Help?"

Sirius barked out a laugh and slid his arm around her waist. She grinned drunkenly up at him. "Need the bathroom first."

Sirius maneuvered her into the bathroom and shut the door. Five minutes later and clad in just her bathrobe, Lily fell into door and pulled it open. Sirius was sitting on the bed waiting for her. He quickly moved across the room and grabbed her before she could fall onto her face.

Lily slung her arm around Sirius' waist and giggled. "I need more champagne."

Sirius led her to the bed. "No more champagne for you, madam. Come on, let's get you into bed."

Sitting Lily on the bed, Sirius pulled back the covers.

Lily put her arms around Sirius' neck and pulled him towards her. "Don't go. I don't want to be on my own tonight."

Sirius removed Lily's arms. "Lily. I'm going home."

Lily started to cry. "Please, Sirius. I just want to feel something again. Please stay."

Sirius gently wiped her tears away. "Lily. You've had too much to drink. You'll just end up regretting this in the morning and..."

Lily drowned out whatever Sirius was going to say by covering his mouth with her own. Sirius wanted to pull away, but all thoughts of leaving went out of his head as Lily moved her mouth from his to kiss a tender spot behind his ear.

Sirius moaned, and then, before he could change his mind, pushed Lily away from him. "Lily. Stop. We can't do this."

Lily fell back onto the bed, her red hair splayed wantonly across the pillow. "It's just one night, Sirius. Just one night."

Lily awoke the next day with a pounding headache and, as her memories of the previous night came rushing back, Lily knew that she was going to be sick. Pulling free of Sirius's grasp, she grabbed her robe off the floor, and dashed into the bathroom. Moments later Sirius was at her side, holding her hair up while she vomited again and again. Eventually Lily's heaving subsided and she gently pushed Sirius away from her. After pulling on her bathrobe and pushing her hair into a band she turned around, to find Sirius still standing there. Ignoring him, she brushed her teeth and headed out of the bathroom.

Sirius followed her. "Lily, I..."

Lily cut Sirius off before he could say anything. "Please just go, Sirius." Lily was disgusted at herself. How could she have slept with him?

"No. We need to talk about last night." Sirius refused to move.

Lily's pounding head and guilt fired up her temper. "Let's talk about last night then, shall we? You interrupted a dinner between me and my fiancé. Yes, Sirius, that's right, my fiancé. I'd accepted his proposal only minutes before you turned up at the door. That's why I

had champagne chilling in the refrigerator. Craig bought it to celebrate our engagement.”

Now it was Sirius’ turn to get angry. “How could you get engaged to him? James is barely cold in his grave.”

Lily’s voice was cold and hard. “You didn’t care about that last night when we slept together.”

“That’s totally different and you know it.” Sirius retorted.

A thought then occurred to Sirius. “Have you slept with him?”

Lily refused to look at Sirius. Incensed by her lack of her response, Sirius strode across the room and grabbed her by the arms. “Well, have you?”

Lily still didn’t answer and Sirius lost it. Screaming at her, he shook her so hard that her hair fell from the band she’d just placed it in. “Obviously you did. Did you play the whore for him as well? Did you scream for him like you did for me? Perhaps we should compare notes.”

At that moment, Jamie, frightened by the screaming coming from his mother’s room, started to cry.

Hearing her son’s weeping, Lily broke free from Sirius’ grasp and yelled at him. “Just get out. Get out. Get out.”

“Oh God, Lily. I’m so sorry. I didn’t mean...” Sirius looked horrified.

Turning to leave the room, Lily turned to Sirius, and spoke in a lackluster tone. “Please, Sirius. Just leave.”

When she came back from dealing with Jamie, who was now sitting in his favorite seat watching the children’s programs on TV and eating his breakfast, Sirius had gone. Throwing herself onto the bed, Lily burst into tears and buried her face in the sheets; the same sheets that still smelled of Sirius.

That afternoon, she went to see Craig.

"Lily, what's wrong?" Craig was alarmed at Lily's white face.

"I'm really sorry but I can't marry you." Lily handed Craig his ring back.

"Why ever not?" Craig demanded. Lily had seemed so happy when he'd proposed last night. He wondered what had happened to make her change her mind.

"After you left last night, I slept with Sirius. I'm so sorry; I'd had too much to drink, and I just didn't want to be alone." Lily started to cry into her hands.

Craig reached out and pulled her into his arms. "Lily, it's okay. We'll get through this."

"But I slept with someone else." Lily protested, ashamed of her behavior.

"Are you going to do it again?" Craig asked.

"Of course not." Lily responded heatedly.

"We all make mistakes. You were brave enough to come to me and admit to yours." Craig spoke soothingly to Lily. He'd really fallen hard for the red-haired woman who had dared to stand up to Voldemort. Inside he was seething at Black. He was going to kill the bastard. He knew that it all had to be Black's fault and that he must have taken advantage of Lily's vulnerability.

"I don't know what to say." Lily couldn't believe that Craig had forgiven her so easily.

"Just tell me that you love me and you still want to marry me." Craig smiled down at Lily.

"I love you and still want to marry you." Lily then kissed Craig on the lips. As he started to deepen the kiss, Lily pulled away. "I'm really

sorry but Poppy is looking after Jamie for me. I said that I wouldn't be too long."

Craig sighed. Every time he and Lily started to get intimate, she always had an excuse to stop him from taking things too far. "That's okay. I'll see you on Tuesday night."

Lily kissed him quickly again, and then apparated out of the room.

Present Time

Remus was astounded. "He was actually willing to forgive you, even after what you did?"

Lily nodded. "He's a nice guy. Actually he blamed Sirius for everything. The pair of them ended up rolling around the floor trying to knock the living daylights out of each other. It's funny to think that they're best friends now!"

Remus felt a little regretful. Sirius had once been his best friend. "I'm glad that things worked out alright for you in the end."

"Me too. Anyway, I think Craig's really glad he didn't marry me." Lily looked happy.

"Why's that?" Remus asked.

"He's just proposed to Narcissa, and she said yes." Lily grinned.

"I hope he knows what he is getting himself into." Remus said.

Lily laughed loudly. "He should do, they've been seeing each for over five years now."

"Why didn't you marry Craig? He'd forgiven you for about what happened." Remus wondered if Lily's guilt had got in the way.

"I couldn't. I realized that I didn't love him as a wife should love her husband. I think he simply represented the security that I had just lost with James' dying. I also realized that I was in love with Sirius. To cap

things off, I discovered I was pregnant with Orion.” Lily’s face softened as she thought of her husband and youngest son.

“And?” Remus felt as if he was watching a muggle soap opera where he needed to find out what happened next.

“After their fight, Sirius found out that I’d ended things with Craig. He came round to apologize for his behavior and to beg for my forgiveness. We ended up in bed together again and I told him about Orion. He proposed there and then. We got up, pulled on some clothes and got married the same day. And that, as they say, is that.” Lily yawned, the wine and emotion had left her exhausted. “I’d love to stay but...”

“Why don’t you? You’ll only splice yourself if try to apparate home now. You can take my room. I’ll sleep in here.” Remus got up and walked into his bedroom. Taking a shirt out of the closet, he transfigured it into a long nightgown for Lily to wear.

“You take the bathroom first.” He handed the gown over to Lily who took it and went into the bathroom to change.

Coming out of the bathroom, Remus noticed that Lily’s neck was now bare, and he gently reached out to touch her collarbone.

“It disappeared a few years ago.” Lily explained. “You marked someone else didn’t you?”

Remus nodded. “Yes I did. But it was a huge mistake.”

“It wasn’t Petunia was it?” Lily just knew that Remus hadn’t marked her sister, particularly after he had complained about having to marry her. “You don’t even have a picture of her here.”

“No, it wasn’t.” Remus looked ashamed. “I haven’t got a picture because... Hell, I don’t really know how to say this.”

“Just spit it out quickly.” Lily advised Remus.

“I don’t love your sister. I never have.” Remus looked embarrassed.

"Oh, Remus. I'm so sorry." As happy as she was in her own marriage, Lily felt only sympathy for him.

"It's your sister you should feel sorry for. She fought tooth and nail to keep Harry, even going so far as to marry a bastard like me." Remus couldn't look Lily in the eye.

"Come on Remus, so you made one mistake. I'm no better. Look at what I did to Craig with Sirius." Lily pointed out.

"You've only done it once, but I've lost count of the women I've slept with." Remus confessed to Lily, glad to have finally told someone.

Lily was shocked. "I don't know what to say."

Remus shook his head. "You don't have to say anything. I know what I am and what I've done. Your sister deserves better."

Sitting back down next to Remus, Lily looked at him. "Why do you do it?"

"Because I can't have the one woman I've always wanted." Remus stood up. "Sirius is a lucky man."

"No, I'm the lucky one. Goodnight Remus." Lily reached up and kissed Remus gently on the cheek, then headed into the bedroom.

"Goodnight Lily." Remus went into the bathroom. When he came out, the light in his bedroom had been extinguished. Sighing he grabbed a blanket from the closet in the hallway and lay down on the sofa.

The Next Morning

Apparting home the next day, Lily discovered that Sirius had left her a note saying that he had been called into the hospital as they had an emergency. She still sometimes found it hard to believe that Sirius actually held a responsible position where he was in charge of a large staff. He only answered to Craig, who was his direct boss. Sirius hadn't told her that he had changed vocation until after they had

gotten married. To say that it had come as a surprise to Lily was something of an understatement.

Lily hugged herself. She couldn't believe that her son was alive. She and Remus had sat down and talked through what they would do about Harry. Remus had said that he would speak to Petunia tomorrow. Lily knew that her sister was going to be upset. However, Lily had promised Remus that she wouldn't just try and take Harry back. He said that he and Petunia would speak to Harry during the Christmas holidays.

Lily had told Remus that she would speak to Sirius before she told Jamie. However, she didn't know how well her husband would take the fact that she had spoken to Remus. Lily had decided that she wouldn't tell Jamie until after the Christmas holiday. She didn't want to spoil the Christmas holidays with his tantrums. Jamie's spiteful remarks about Harry in his letter didn't bode well for future relations between the boys, but Lily hoped that Jamie would change his mind once he knew that Harry was his brother.

When she brought the children back home, Lily was going to talk to Narcissa about Dumbledore and his machinations. Remus had told Lily about how Dumbledore had inveigled him into marrying her sister, as well as the incident at the airport where he had nearly died. Lily was interested in charms and had taken Remus' earring to look it over to see if she could spot anything unusual about it. She had never heard of an enchantment being able to be broken by muggle methods before. Remus had assured her that if she couldn't discover anything about the earring, he had a friend who might be able to shed some light on the matter.

Walking into the kitchen, Lily shooed Kimble, their house elf out. She wanted to cook a nice meal for everyone. If everything went well, she decided that she would tell Sirius that night.

Whew, that was a bit of a long one for me. Sorry, but it may be some time before I post again. Unfortunately I have five papers to research and post by Wednesday, plus commenting on other students' papers as well as two exams to take on Tuesday. I am then going away on

vacation on Thursday night and won't be back until the following Monday night (which means no access to a computer).

As I said last time, we are slowly going to start to steer back into canon waters again for a while – you can expect to see Lockhart's Valentine Day, Hagrid's arrest, and Moaning Myrtle some time in the next few chapters. In the next chapter, we will see Petunia and Sirius' reactions to the news that Harry is still alive; the diary disappears and we have Christmas capers as all hell breaks loose in the Black household as Jamie finds out about his brother.

There's probably only four or so more chapters left in this year. Thanks for sticking with it!

Chapter 23: A New Alliance and A Rescue

Lily had just finished prepping everything ready for the meal that night, when the front door opened to reveal Narcissa being followed by Lily's children.

Orion broke away from his siblings, and rushed up to his mother. "Mum, guess what?"

"What?" Lily knew that even if she hadn't answered, Orion would still have told her.

"I'm going to be the ring bearer at Aunt Narcy's wedding." Orion grinned happily at his Mum. "And guess what else?"

Lily smiled at her son; she had no idea what else he could want to tell her. "I don't know. What else?"

"She's getting married the day after my birthday." Orion was bubbling over with excitement.

Lily turned to Narcissa who just grinned. "You've set the date?"

"We decided on it last night." Narcissa turned to the two girls, who had been quiet the entire time their brother had been speaking. "Why don't you tell your mother what you will be doing at my wedding?"

Cassie moved to stand by her mother, her red haired curling softly around her face, making her look like a Botticelli painting. "I'm going to be a flower girl, Mummy."

"I'm sure you're looking very beautiful, sweetheart." Lily gently tucked Cassie's hair back and kissed her daughter on the top of her head. "And Anna, what about you?"

"I'm going to be a bridesmaid. Aunt Narcy said I was too big to be a flower girl." Anna looked contemptuously at her little sister.

Lily caught the look. “Anna, if I see you pulling faces at your sister like that again, you won’t be doing anything at the wedding. Now say sorry.”

Frightened at the thought of not being part of the wedding, Anna hurriedly apologized to her little sister. “Sorry, Cass.”

“S’okay.” Cassie didn’t look at her sister and clung to her mother.

Lily looked down at her children. Orion looked like a miniature version of Sirius, whereas Cassiopeia and Adrianna were both red-heads like herself. However, only Cassie had received her green eyes; her siblings took after their father with soft gray eyes. Cassie and Ori were both good natured children. Sadly, Anna seemed to have taken after her old brother and could sometimes be quite spiteful towards her siblings.

Lily needed to speak to Narcissa alone, so she sent the children off to play. “Please go to your playroom. I’ll call you when its time to wash up for dinner.”

The three children did as they were told, and Lily let out her breath.

“She can be a bit of a madam, can’t she?’ Narcissa was only too well aware of Anna’s predilection for picking on her siblings.

“Tell me something I don’t know. Anyway, thanks for taking them off my hands for me.” Lily hugged Narcissa. “And congratulations on finally setting the date.”

“Craig was too drunk to go home last night and came back to the Dowager House with Sirius. I sent Sirius off, and Craig decided that he wanted to set the wedding date there and then. He didn’t remember this morning, but was happy to stick with what he had drunkenly decided upon. So we’re getting married on 6th February. I’m going to ask Draco to give me away, and Sirius is going to be Craig’s best man. I’m also going to need a matron of honor.” Narcissa looked expectantly at Lily.

“Me?” Lily was stunned. She hadn’t expected to be included like this.

“Yes, you. We’re going to ask Jamie to be an usher.” Narcissa was looking forward to finally making her relationship with Craig legal. “Enough about me though. What happened last night? Did you see your sister?”

“I didn’t. I got something much better.” Lily’s face now looked similar to how her son’s had looked when he had been bursting to tell her about his news.

“A night in bed with Remus?” Narcissa teased.

Lily laughed, and slapped her friend. “Don’t be facetious. It’s much better than that.”

Narcissa was at a loss. “I give in.”

“Harry’s alive.” Lily’s face was shining with happiness.

“Harry, as in your son Harry?” Narcissa wanted to make sure she understood exactly what her friend was telling her.

“Yes, as in my son Harry.” Lily then proceeded to tell her friend about what had transpired the previous night, only omitting the private discussion about Remus’ extra marital activities; that was something Narcissa didn’t need to know about.

“It just doesn’t make sense. Why would Dumbledore want to steal Harry, and give him to your sister?” Narcissa was thrilled for her friend, but still couldn’t understand the reasoning behind Dumbledore’s actions.

“Remus and I discussed that this morning. Of course, it’s only a supposition, but we think that he wanted me to focus all of my attention on Jamie. When I first came round in the hospital, Dumbledore was a constant visitor. He treated us both like family. We think he enjoyed the fame and attention that came with Jamie’s new status. I didn’t want to deal with the press and the hassle that came with it, so Dumbledore took it all on for me.” Lily and Remus had

spent quite some time going back and forth trying to work out what could have prompted Dumbledore's actions.

"I don't know; Dumbledore's already famous in his own right." Narcissa pointed out. "There has to be another reason for it."

Lily shrugged. "I don't know what other reason there could be. Remus is coming here tomorrow night to discuss Dumbledore, after he has told Petunia about Harry."

"But Sirius still isn't friends with Remus." Narcissa couldn't believe her friend would put the two adversaries together in the same room.

"I know. He's just going to have to deal with it. Remus is okay with it. I've already explained to him what I plan to do to get them together again." Lily told Narcissa.

"It's all well and good you and Remus knowing, but I'd still like to be let in how you are going to get Sirius in the same room as Remus." Narcissa didn't like the look on Lily's face.

"You're going to help me." Lily's smile was sweeter than sugar.

Knowing she'd end up going along with Lily's plans anyway, Narcissa resignedly shrugged. "Tell me what you want me to do."

Later that night

Sirius watched as Lily shooed the children off to bed. The meal she'd cooked had been fantastic. He watched as she came back into the room. She'd looked nervous all night, and he wondered what was wrong.

"Lily, why don't you sit down and tell me what's wrong." Sirius took a mouthful of his Chablis, and swallowed appreciatively.

"I don't know how to tell you this but..." Lily started only to be interrupted by Sirius who had leapt to his feet.

"You're pregnant?" Sirius hoped he was right. They had been trying for another baby since the summer.

Lily shook her head and took a deep breath. She hoped she was doing the right thing. "You know I didn't come home last night."

"Of course. You spent it with an old school friend. Narcy told me." Sirius sat back down. He suddenly got the feeling that he wasn't going to be too happy about whatever Lily was going to tell him.

"I'm afraid I lied to her. I spent it with Remus." Lily needed Sirius to think that Narcissa didn't know for her plan to work. She then fell silent and waited for the explosion.

She wasn't disappointed. "You mean to tell me that while Narcissa looked after our children, you were out fucking Remus Lupin."

"I said I spent the night with him; not that I slept with him." Lily got up. "Please let me explain."

"I thought you loved me. You know how I feel about that wanker and you do this to me." Sirius ignored Lily's pleas, drowning out her words with his own as he advanced on her.

Not stopping to hear any more, Lily apparated away. Sirius growled and apparated too.

Narcissa was eating dinner with Craig when Sirius apparated directly into the dining room. "Where is she?"

"Where is who?" Narcissa knew exactly who Sirius was looking for.

"My whoring wife, that's who." Sirius was by now, nose to nose with Narcissa.

"I have no idea." Lily had been right, Narcissa thought. She'd known that Sirius would jump to the wrong conclusion and wouldn't listen to her. His hotheadedness was one of his less attractive traits.

“Apparently she didn’t spend last night with an old school friend; she spent it with Remus Lupin.” Sirius ground out.

Counting to three before she spoke, Narcissa looked at Craig to warn him to be quiet. “I know.”

“What do you mean, you know?” Sirius grabbed Narcissa by the arm.

Narcissa ignored Sirius’ question, and asked him one of her own. “Did you let her tell you why she spent last night with Remus?”

“I would have thought that would be patently obvious.” Sirius’ tone was sarcastic, as he spat his words into Narcissa’s face.

“She wasn’t there for the reason you thought she was.” Narcissa stopped herself from pulling away, even though Sirius’ grip on her arm had grown quite painful.

“Oh, and what reason would be that?” Sirius spat out.

“She found out that Remus is married to her sister, and went round to confront him.” Narcissa started to tell Sirius, only for him to interrupt her.

“So she decided to stay overnight and cheer up him up.”

Narcissa finally pulled free of Sirius’ grip. “Just bloody well shut up and let me finish.”

Sirius fell silent. He’d never heard his cousin curse before.

“As I was saying, she went there to question Remus. She had originally intended to confront her sister, but I pointed out to her that it might not be a good idea in front of Petunia’s children.” Narcissa pointedly stared at Sirius as he opened his mouth to interrupt.

“I arranged for us to meet with Remus, and we went round there yesterday. They got into a huge fight and I left. When I saw her this morning, she told me what she had found out.”

Sirius' temper had abated somewhat, and he was now interested to find out exactly what his wife had discovered. "What did she find out?"

"That her son Harry's still alive." Narcissa dropped the bombshell on Sirius.

Sirius staggered backwards and sat down heavily on the chair behind him. "But Harry was killed by Voldemort. How can he still be alive?"

"Lily will tell you." Narcissa refused to explain to Sirius.

"But I don't know where she's gone." Sirius complained.

"Where do you think she's gone, Sirius?" Narcissa responded, happy that the conversation had gone in the direction Lily had hoped it would.

Sirius felt his temper start to rise again. "She's gone to him, hasn't she?"

"I wouldn't know, but I wouldn't be surprised after the way you've just acted." Narcissa enjoyed tormenting Sirius, especially after what he had just done to her arm.

"Where does he live, Narcissa?" Sirius demanded Remus' address from his cousin.

"223B, Baker Street, London." Narcissa flung at Sirius, as she turned her back on him and marched out.

Craig followed but not before speaking to Sirius. "I don't know what's going on, Sirius. But if you ever lay a finger on my fiancé again, I'll kill you."

Narcissa heard Sirius apparate out, and opened her bedroom door. Lily was sitting on the bed. "Well, did he take the bait?"

Narcissa nodded. "You know my cousin; he's a hothead who doesn't think before he leaps. A typical Gryffindor!"

Lily jumped up and hugged Narcissa, who flinched. "Narcy, are you okay?"

"Sirius was a little rough with his grip." Narcissa looked at her arm, which was already starting to purple.

"Let me heal that." Craig had stood at the door, listening to women's discussion. "Perhaps next time you can let me know when you're going to pull a stunt like that."

Narcissa kissed Craig and smiled at him. "Sorry, I didn't think."

"But I just threatened to kill Sirius if he ever touched you again." Craig burst out.

"You didn't?" Narcissa was shocked. Craig was the most easy-going person she knew.

"I'm afraid I did." Craig had surprised himself.

"Oh Craig, no-one's ever done anything like that for me before." Narcissa threw herself into Craig's arms and planted another kiss on him.

Watching the kiss deepen, Lily decided it was time for her to go, and she apparated home to wait for Sirius' return.

Sirius apparated as closely as he could to Baker Street. He quickly found the row of apartments where Remus' house was situated. Not bothering with the intercom, Sirius looked round, and then pulled out his wand. "Alohomora."

The door swung open and Sirius entered. After checking the directory on the wall, which told him that Remus' apartment was situated on the second floor, Sirius marched up the stairs to Remus' apartment and began to pound heavily on Remus' front door.

Remus pulled open his door, his wand held behind his back. "Sirius. What the bloody hell are you doing here?"

"Where's my wife?" Sirius pushed past Remus and stormed into Remus' sitting room.

"She's not here." Remus watched as Sirius opened all the doors in the apartment.

"Do you know where she is then?" Sirius faced his old friend.

Remus shook his head. "Sorry, but no."

"Damn it!" Sirius swore, as he brushed his hand through his hair. He now had no idea where his wife was.

"I take it you had some sort of argument. Although I have no idea why you would think Lily was here." Remus had every idea, as it was he and Lily who had tried to engineer this scenario.

"Yes, of course we had an argument. She disappeared and I thought she had gone to Narcissa's. Narcissa then more or less told that Lily had come running to you for comfort." Sirius wondered why he was even bothering to explain himself to Remus.

Remus steered the conversation towards Harry. "I presume that Lily told you about Harry then."

"Not exactly." Sirius paced the small room angrily.

Remus shut the front door and went to his drinks cabinet. All he'd seemed to do lately was drink. However, he decided that now probably wasn't the best time to quit, and poured himself a large scotch. He then looked at Sirius, who nodded.

Pouring out a second glass of the amber liquid, Remus gave the glass to Sirius, and moved past him to sit down.

Sirius felt silly standing up in the middle of the room, so he copied Remus and sat down as well. Feeling a little vindictive, Sirius picked the worst subject he could think of. "So I hear you married Petunia.

What on earth possessed you do that? You could have had practically any woman you wanted.”

“Hardly. How many women do you know that would look beyond my affliction?” Remus hoped that Sirius’ willingness to start a conversation might help them to get over their bitter parting of the ways, at least enough so that the two of them could remain the same room together.

“Even so, Petunia should have been at the bottom of the list.” Sirius shuddered at the thought of Lily’s sister. He had never liked her. “She’s skinny, unattractive, and nosy. Why pick her?”

“I was in the wrong place at the right time.” Remus said cryptically.

“Couldn’t you have just said no?” Sirius’ curiosity was piqued by Remus’ response to his question.

“I did.” Remus responded.

“But how did you end up marrying her then?” Sirius sat back on the sofa and waited for Remus’ answer.

“I was at Hogwarts with Dumbledore when an alarm went off to indicate someone was using magic in Nia’s home. I apparated in and dealt with the problem. Nia’s husband had tried to hurt her, and Harry had used accidental magic to deal with the attack. Dumbledore then appeared and threatened to take Harry away from Nia, who had been looking after him after Lily’s accident, and put him into care. You know what the rules were then. She couldn’t keep a wizarding child as a muggle not married to a wizard, and I couldn’t take Harry as a werewolf. Our marriage would have circumvented those rules.

Dumbledore asked me to marry Nia and take Harry on; I refused. Dumbledore obliviated both of us and ordered me to ask Nia to get married. A simple compulsion charm dealt with any reticence Nia might have had. Until last year, I thought that I had voluntarily asked her.” Remus took a deep draught of his liquor after he finished speaking.

“What happened last year?” Sirius was now hooked.

“The charm that Dumbledore had placed on me was sabotaged by a muggle airport detector. I actually died. With my death, the oath I swore to Dumbledore in my sixth year, was negated. The medical team at the airport brought me back to life. When I awoke in my hospital bed, I remembered everything that Dumbledore had ever done to me, including the memories he had obliviated.” Remus’ tone was bitter.

“So why haven’t you done anything about it?” Sirius asked. “And why did Nia need to look after Harry? If Dumbledore knew Harry was alive, why did he lie to Lily?”

Remus sighed. “We are going to do something about it, and I don’t know why Dumbledore did what he did but we’re going to try to find out.”

“Whose we?” Sirius inquired.

“Lily, Narcissa and myself. You, if you’re interested.” Remus raised an eyebrow in question.

“Of course, I’m interested.” Sirius was outraged that Remus even considered that he wouldn’t be. Sirius got up and filled up his glass again. He looked to Remus who just nodded.

After taking the glass, Remus decided to take the bull by the horns. “Can I ask you something?”

Sirius shrugged. “Go ahead.”

“Why didn’t you kill me when you found me in bed with Eleanor?” Remus had always wondered why Sirius had threatened him, and had then just let him walk away unscathed.

“I owed you a debt for risking your life when I pulled that stunt on Severus. When I let you leave unhurt, we were even.” Sirius explained.

“What did you do to Eleanor?” Remus had never really thought much about the girl he had left lying in the bed to face Sirius alone.

“I asked for my ring back. She begged me to change my mind, pleading that you’d forced her to sleep with you.” Sirius laughed bitterly.

“I didn’t force her to do anything.” Remus defended himself. “She’d been coming on to me for weeks. That night I’d had too much to drink. The next thing I knew we were in bed together. You know the rest.”

“Oh I knew she was lying. It’s not your style to force anyone into bed.” Sirius looked at his former friend.

“I’m sorry.” Remus apologized.

Sirius shook his head. “I’m not. I got the better deal. I’ve got Lily now.”

Remus ignored the dig about Lily. “I don’t remember reading anything about the broken engagement in the Prophet.”

“You wouldn’t have. She was found dead the next day.” Sirius said in a matter of fact voice.

“You don’t sound too upset about it.” Remus thought Sirius a little cold.

“I’m not. It was a long time ago.” Sirius pointed out.

“What happened to her?” Remus asked.

“She went home and hung herself from the pear tree in her parents’ garden. Her parents hushed things up with a large payment to the Prophet. It was reported that she had died in an accident.” Sirius explained.

“Shit, that must have been awful for you.” Remus felt guilty.

“Not really.” Sirius sat up. “She’d betrayed me; I didn’t really care what happened to her after that.”

Remus was shocked. "I never thought I'd hear you say something like that."

"And I never thought I'd find my best friend in bed with my fiancée, but I did." Sirius got up. "I've got to go. I need to find Lily."

Remus took Sirius' empty glass. "I'm sorry you had to find out about Harry like this."

"So am I." Sirius looked at Remus. "I'm going to be straight with you. Yes, I'll be civil at any meeting Lily and Narcissa set up, but don't expect me to be best friends with you again any time soon. Thanks for the drink."

Sirius apparated out and back to Narcissa's home. "Narcy."

Narcissa heard Sirius calling her and turned to Craig. "Stay in bed. I'll be back in a minute."

Sirius spun round as Narcissa apparated next to him. "What can I do for you now, Sirius?"

"Lily set me up didn't she?" Sirius asked his cousin.

Sighing, Narcissa nodded. "Yes. She didn't know how else to get you into the same room as Remus. How did you know?"

"Remus was far too relaxed for someone who I'd threatened to kill if I ever saw him again. I still wasn't entirely sure though, so I thought I would ask you first, and you've just confirmed my suspicions for me." Sirius left Narcissa standing, as he apparated home.

Lily was waiting for him in the sitting room. He marched up to her and slapped her across the face. "Don't you dare ever set me up like that again. You knew I would go running to Remus' home looking for you if you weren't at Narcissa's, didn't you?"

Lily was too shocked to cry. Sirius had never lifted a finger to her before. "I needed to get you to speak to Remus again."

"Well, now you've got you wanted. I'm speaking to Remus again. I hope it was worth it." Sirius' face was like stone.

"I'm sorry." Lily didn't know what else to say.

"I expect you are." Sirius turned and left the room.

Four hours later, and Sirius was still awake. Lily hadn't yet come to bed and he wondered where she was. Getting up, he pulled on his shirt over his pajama bottoms, and headed downstairs to look for her. She was sitting in front of the fire, drinking what looked like brandy, a photo album open on her lap. She looked up as Sirius moved closer to her.

Sirius saw that her face had already begun to bruise where he had hit her. Swearing under his breath, he pulled out his wand, and healed it. "I'm sorry."

Lily shook her head. "I deserved it."

"Probably, but I still shouldn't have done it." Sirius looked at the album. "Are those pictures of Harry?"

Lily nodded and passed the album to Sirius, who took it from her. Seeing the brandy decanter sitting next to Lily, he picked it up and topped up her glass, before getting up and grabbing a glass himself.

After pouring himself a drink, Sirius quietly looked through the album. There was no mistaking that Harry was James' son; not as a young child anyway. "He looks happy."

"I hope so." Lily spoke quietly. "I need to see him so badly, Sirius. I remember the first time he was placed in my arms. He had a huge mop of black hair, and he just lay there looking quietly up at me. He was so beautiful."

Sirius put his arm around his wife and pulled her close to him. "I expect Jamie was too wasn't he?"

Lily laughed. "Not exactly. The little stinker wouldn't stop crying."

Sirius kissed Lily gently. "Let's go to bed."

Lily kissed Sirius back. "Let's stay right here."

The Next Night

"Narcissa, I've brought someone with me." Remus started speaking as soon as he stepped out of the floo.

Moments later the floo flared up again, and Narcissa laid eyes on one of the most attractive men she had ever seen. "And who might you be?"

"Felidae Venant, Ms. Black. I hope you don't mind, but Remus filled me in on what you were planning to do. I want to offer any help I can." Felidae advanced forward and took Narcissa's outstretched hand, brushing his lips over her knuckles before releasing her hand.

Narcissa blushed slightly. She now knew who he was; Severus' daughter's fiancé. Looking him over once more, she decided that Hermione was a very lucky girl. Her thoughts were interrupted by Sirius' entrance.

"And why should we just trust this man?" Sirius Black stood framed into the doorway of the room that had been set aside for the meeting.

"Lord Black." Felidae bowed stiffly. "I am happy to do whatever is necessary to prove that I am trustworthy, including swearing any oath you may consider necessary."

"You're damn right you will." Sirius had taken an immediate disliking to the man.

Lily pushed past Sirius and walked up to Felidae. "Mr. Venant, it is nice to meet you, but my husband has a point. Why should we include you in any information we share tonight?"

“Because I have access to information about Dumbledore that you do not.” Felidae informed Lily.

“And what information might that be?” Sirius questioned the man.

“I’ll reveal what I know, once we’ve take the necessary precautions to prevent what is said in this room from going any further than the five of us.” Felidae hedged.

“Six actually.” Craig entered the room, and walked up to Felidae. “Craig Delaney, Narcissa’s fiancé.”

In contrast to Sirius, Felidae immediately liked the man’s open manners and approachable demeanor. “Felidae Venant.”

The two shook hands.

Sirius pushed past the pair and sat down. “Perhaps we should get on with it.”

Lily looked at Remus, who closed the door and went to stand at the head of the table. “I’ve filled Felidae in what Dumbledore did to me. I haven’t said anything about you Lily.”

Taking her cue, Lily told Felidae about Dumbledore and his treatment of her.

“I’m not surprised.” Felidae stated calmly. “Dumbledore has done some terrible things during his life, so this doesn’t really come as a big shock.”

“What things would those be?” Sirius asked, not really expecting Felidae to reveal anything of great interest.

Felidae drew out his wand. “I need everyone to swear an oath first that what we are about to discuss, will stay strictly between the six of us.”

“What if we want to bring anyone else in this group?” Lily asked.

“Then they too will need to swear an oath before they can be told what I am about to tell you.” Felidae clarified Lily’s question.

“Who made you the leader?” Sirius really didn’t like Felidae’s coming in and taking over the meeting.

“I have no wish to be leader. I just need to make sure that any information I pass on to you all remains confidential.” Felidae clamped down on his urge to curse the man.

Narcissa stood up. “Mr. Venant has a point. We should get on with swearing an oath not to reveal what is discussed here.”

Sirius, however, wanting to prove that he was actually in charge, declared that they should think of something to call themselves first. The group then wasted the next twenty minutes going round in circles trying to decide upon a name. Sirius had sulked when no-one had backed him up when he had wanted to call them ‘The Empire Alliance’. Lily had told him off for watching too much Star Wars as Remus sniggered at his former friend. Eventually they settled simply on the Alliance, and all six swore an oath of allegiance to the new group. Felidae went one step further, also swearing that what he was about to tell them about Dumbledore was the truth.

Felidae then returned to a subject they had been discussing earlier. “I’m glad that we’ve got that settled. Before I tell you anything about Dumbledore, I want to return to the issue of Harry. You realize what Harry’s still being alive means, don’t you?”

No-one could work out what Felidae was intimating.

Narcissa spoke up. “I’m sure you’re going to tell us.”

“Because both of Lily’s children survived Voldemort’s attack, either of them could be the true Boy Who Lived.” Felidae pointed out.

“But Jamie’s got the curse scar on his forehead.” Lily argued.

Felidae turned to Remus. “Does Harry have one?”

Remus shook his head. "Harry only has one scar. It's on his shoulder, and I don't think it's a curse scar. It was quite small until last year. He was on holiday and fell and ripped open his shoulder where his previous scar was. His nanny took him to a muggle hospital where it was repaired using muggle methods. It was too late to heal the scar that was left by the time Harry returned to school. There is now no way to tell if it is a curse scar or not."

"So there is an outside possibility that Harry may be the Boy Who Lived?" Lily asked.

Felidae nodded. "I believe so."

"Do you think Dumbledore thinks he is?" Sirius asked.

"No. Dumbledore sidelined Harry to get Lily to focus on Jamie. I think the only reason Harry is still around is that Dumbledore wants back-up in case he's wrong." Felidae explained his hypothesis.

"I'll kill him before I let him touch my son." Remus declared.

"So will I." Lily backed up Remus.

Everyone fell silent, until Sirius spoke up. "So, Venant, I think it's time you told us what you know about Dumbledore."

Felidae had had to jump through hoops to be allowed to reveal the information he was about to. "I am part of an organization that is monitoring Dumbledore's movements. We had a witness who swore that it wasn't Grindelwald who incited Hitler to begin the Second World War amongst the muggles, but Dumbledore himself."

"That's hardly inspiring." Sirius said sarcastically.

"I know. Unfortunately our witness died a short time ago. All we have now are his testimonies in a pensieve." Felidae looked around the table.

"Whose are they?" Lily asked.

"I'd rather not say." Felidae hedged.

"And we'd rather you did." Sirius pushed.

Felidae's response shocked the gathering. "Gellert Grindelwald's."

"But I thought he died in 1945." Narcissa blurted out.

"That's what everyone was supposed to think. In fact he was being held in a secure location. Unfortunately it wasn't secure enough, and someone broke in looking for something Grindelwald possessed. Not finding it, he killed Grindelwald anyway. We have every reason to believe the assassin was Dumbledore." Felidae explained.

"How can you be sure it was Dumbledore, and what was Dumbledore after?" Sirius wondered why someone would break into a prison to look for something; it must have been of immense value or of great importance.

"We had been monitoring Dumbledore movements as we normally did. Then a few weeks prior to Grindelwald's death, Dumbledore was spotted close to the area where we kept Grindelwald imprisoned. Unfortunately we cannot prove it was Dumbledore who killed Grindelwald, as the agent who was tasked with following Dumbledore was found dead. I'm afraid I can't tell you what we believe he was after." Felidae hadn't been given permission to impart this sensitive piece of information.

"If what you say about Dumbledore is true, then that would mean that he is culpable for the killing of thousands of innocent men, women and children." Lily, who had studied the Second World War in primary school, was sickened.

"I'm afraid so. Now, you understand why we are keeping such a close eye on his dealings. Unfortunately, we don't have any proof that it was Dumbledore who was responsible for these heinous crimes, other than Grindelwald's personal testimonies. As you can imagine, a personal testimony from the Butcher would hardly have won people over back in 1945; it is therefore highly unlikely that his pensieve

memories would convince people now.” Venant looked round at the disbelieving faces.

Narcissa spoke up. “If it wasn’t for the fact that you had sworn to tell us the truth, I probably would have thought you were lying. Even knowing that, I can still hardly believe it myself.”

Everyone else nodded in agreement with Narcissa’s statement.

Felidae continued. “Your reactions prove my point. However, our immediate concern is that it appears that nearly every member of staff at Hogwarts has been coerced or bullied into a swearing an oath of allegiance to Dumbledore.”

“Why is that such an immediate concern? You must have known of this for some time if Dumbledore is really as bad as you say he is.” Lily pointed out.

“Yes we have, but our most recent information has led us to believe that Dumbledore has his phoenix held under an enchantment.” Felidae explained.

“What’s so awful about that? It’s just a bird.” Sirius had a feeling he knew why, but took delight in taunting Venant anyway.

Felidae knew that Sirius was being cantankerous just to annoy him personally. Nevertheless, he decided to explain why to the group. “As you know, phoenix tears are a major ingredient in many potions, including Veritaserum, healing potions, and anti-aging potions. It is because of the healing properties of phoenix tears, that the tears were purportedly to be used in a deadly potion which Grindelwald informed us that Dumbledore had been working on during the Second World War. It allows you to torture your victim to the point of death, only for the tears to kick in at the very brink of death, regenerating your victim so that you can start all over again. Dumbledore, although he is a most competent potions master, was not sufficiently able to refine the potion to make it viable for use. However, we now think that Dumbledore may be forcing Snape to work on the potion for him. Because phoenix’s tears are extremely expensive and difficult to

obtain without a direct source, we need to extract Dumbledore's phoenix from Hogwarts."

"And how do you plan to do that?" Sirius' tone was mocking; he knew that it would be almost impossible to swipe the bird out from under Dumbledore's nose.

"I don't. I have no idea how to achieve Fawkes' removal at the moment, but people are working on it." Felidae admitted.

"Look, its getting late. Why don't we call a halt to the meeting. We can arrange to meet again in two weeks' time. I'll set it up. Expect an invitation to an intimate family dinner." Lily said.

At that moment, one of the Black family house elves, Kimble, appeared, and bowed low. "Master Black, Nurse Poppy, shes is callings you."

Sirius got up and left the room. A few minutes later he returned.

"I need to go to Hogwarts. Harry has collapsed with similar symptoms to those previously displayed by Draco. Severus is out and Poppy needs my help." Sirius turned and left the room, only to come to a halt when both Lily and Remus called out to him.

Lily looked at Remus and sighed. She knew she couldn't go, as much as she wanted to see that her son was alright. Remus squeezed her on the shoulder and moved to stand next to Sirius.

"I'm coming with you." Remus told Sirius, who just nodded.

The two men floored directly into the hospital wing. They found Poppy monitoring an unconscious Harry, who was sweating and trembling in his bed.

Having read all of Poppy's notes on Draco, Sirius checked Harry over. "Has he had any more seizures?"

Poppy shook her head. "No, just the one that I told you about."

Sirius ran a few more tests before nodding. "He seems fairly stable now. However, I am detecting a slight imbalance of chemicals in his brain. As you mentioned in your notes, it is almost as if he had been abusing his body with a foreign substance. I am going to put him into a coma and monitor him for a few days. It'll give him a chance to recover without being over-stimulated."

"I want to stay with him." Remus told Sirius.

"You don't need to. I will stay and monitor his progress tonight." Sirius didn't really want to spend the night in Remus' company.

"That might be so, but I'm his father and I'm staying." Remus stated, in a tone that brooked no argument.

"If that's what you want to do, then it's okay with me. Poppy?" Sirius reluctantly accepted Remus' declaration, before turning to the nurse in charge of the ward for her approval.

"That's fine with me. Please keep things quiet though; I do have other patients in the ward." Poppy warned.

"We will, and thank you." Remus sat down at his son's bedside.

Sirius followed suit on the other side. As the evening turned into night, the two men eventually fell into a companionable discussion about what they had been doing over the years. By the time morning arrived, the pair had begun to make headway in starting to heal the breach that lay between them.

5 December 1992

The fireplace in Sirius' office chimed. Sirius got up and checked to see who it was, before allowing them access to his private sanctuary in the hospital.

Albus Dumbledore stepped out of the fireplace. "Where he is, Sirius?"

"Where is who, Albus?" Sirius had no idea who Albus was looking for.

"Fawkes." Dumbledore looked angry.

"Why would I take your phoenix? It's not like he can't just fly away." Sirius thought the old headmaster had gone mad.

"He had a burning day yesterday, and was unable to fly. Someone has to have taken him. Only two people have been in my office today, and you were the only one who spent time in my office alone, so it stands to reason that it must have been you who took him." Dumbledore wanted his property back. The phoenix's tears were an important resource for many of the potions he had Severus working on.

"I haven't touched your bloody bird, Dumbledore. Look, I've got work to do." Sirius started to walk off, only for Dumbledore to grab his arm.

"I don't think so." Dumbledore's grip was extremely firm for a man of his advancing years.

Sirius pulled free, and turned to face the man. "I didn't take your bird."

"There's no-one else who could have." Dumbledore protested.

Sirius checked the time. "I've a meeting I've got to attend. Can't this wait?"

"No. I demand to know what you have done with Fawkes." Dumbledore stood his ground.

"What do you want from me? I've already said that I haven't taken him. Isn't my word good enough?" Sirius was starting to get annoyed.

"I'm sorry to say it, but no, it isn't. Would you be willing to swear an oath on your magic?" Dumbledore was convinced that Sirius must have had something to do with Fawkes' disappearance.

"No, I wouldn't. I don't see why I should." Sirius went to move away once more.

“Then you leave me no choice. I will have to ask the Auror Division to investigate this matter.” Dumbledore turned to leave.

Sirius wondered whether anyone from Felidae’s organization could have done it, but he couldn’t see how. Not wanting to have anything to do with Auror Division, mainly due to his treatment at their hands during the time before he was thrown into Azkaban, Sirius grimaced to himself. There was no way Sirius was going to swear on his magic, and he therefore offered what seemed to be the only logical solution to the problem. “Look, if it will make you go away, I’m happy to take Veritaserum to prove that I had nothing to do with taking Fawkes.”

Dumbledore was pleased. He had been looking for someone on whom to try out the stock of the modified Veritaserum he had made Severus brew for him. “That would be acceptable.”

Dumbledore then withdrew a handkerchief from his pocket and transformed it into a portkey. “Please take a corner.”

Sirius gingerly took a corner of the handkerchief. Moments later the two men found themselves standing in the Headmaster’s office. Dumbledore called Severus via his fireplace and requested the potion necessary for the task.

When Severus knocked on the Headmaster’s office door, he found Sirius Black standing with the Headmaster. “I have the Veritaserum you requested, Headmaster.”

“Thank you, Severus. That will be all.” Albus dismissed his potions master, who sneered at Sirius as he walked by on his way out.

“I would like you to place three drops of this under your tongue.” Albus passed the bottle to Sirius.

“What about the antidote?” Sirius asked.

Albus passed the second bottle to Sirius who held on to it tightly. He didn’t trust the old man to ask more than the required questions. Doing as Dumbledore had asked, Sirius placed three drops under his

tongue, and immediately felt his head spin. He knew instantly that this wasn't regular Veritaserum.

Albus watched as the drug took effect. "Tell me what you really think of me."

"I hate you." Sirius spat out, unable to prevent himself from telling the Headmaster what he really thought of him.

"Good. It's working." Albus hadn't expected quite so vitriolic a response, but he had had a feeling that Sirius didn't really like him, and he had used the question to test that the Veritaserum was working.

"Did you take Fawkes?" Albus asked.

"No." Sirius gritted his teeth; the Veritaserum was making him feel nauseous, and light-headed.

Albus was surprised. He had been sure that Sirius had taken him. "Do you know who did take Fawkes?"

"No." Sirius was thankful that Dumbledore hadn't phrased the question differently. As he had no idea who Felidae's 'people' were, Sirius was able to answer Dumbledore's question truthfully.

"Thank you." Dumbledore nodded, and Sirius opened the bottle of the antidote and dropped three drops under his tongue. He felt the effects of the Veritaserum begin to subside a little.

"If you have finished falsely accusing me, I'd like to get back to work." Sirius stormed off, and left the Headmaster's room via the door, rather than the fireplace; all he wanted to do was get some fresh air to try and clear his head. Still feeling unwell, Sirius eventually reached the outskirts of the school and apparated away.

It was only later that night that Albus realized that Sirius still had the doctored Veritaserum. Annoyed at his own blunder, he got up and flooded out of the school.

Lily answered the door to find Dumbledore standing there. "What do you want?"

"I'm looking for your husband, Lily." Dumbledore spoke politely.

"I bet you are. Whatever shit was in that mixture you gave him this morning nearly killed Sirius. He's currently upstairs with our healer. I will be informing the Auror Division that you tried to poison my husband." Lily spoke calmly, trying to hold her anger at bay.

"I'm sorry; I didn't realize he would have such a bad reaction to the Veritaserum. It's a new strain Severus is working on." Dumbledore explained.

"You used Sirius as a fucking guinea pig?" Lily let out her anger, her voice getting dangerously close to a scream.

"May I come in?" Albus asked. Lily was still standing in the doorway barring Albus' entrance to her home.

"No, you may not. I want to know why you found it necessary to subject my husband to doctored Veritaserum. Why didn't you use Ministry approved Veritaserum?" Lily demanded answers from Dumbledore.

Albus sighed. He didn't want to have to bother with Auror Division, and he had the feeling that Lily would call them, if she hadn't already, unless he came clean with her. He would have obliviated her if he could have, but he suspected that more than one person was already aware of what Sirius had taken.

"I knew that Sirius might have become immune to standard Veritaserum. I am quite sure that the death eaters probably used it on him continually during his capture." Albus was fully informed on the death eaters' practices with their victims; first they tortured them, then they used Veritaserum and then, just for fun, they would torture their victims again. Usually they would continue this exercise until they were sure that they had learnt everything that their victim knew. After three weeks at the death eaters' mercy, he knew that Sirius would likely have undergone this torture many times.

“That still didn’t give you any right to use it on him without his permission.” Lily wasn’t happy.

“It doesn’t matter.” Craig interrupted the pair. “Sirius said to tell Dumbledore just to go away. He’s going to be fine and won’t be pressing charges. However, if I ever hear of you using an unauthorized derivative of Veritaserum, or any other potion for that matter, on anyone else, I will have you arrested. Do I make myself clear?”

“You do. However, there is the matter of the Veritaserum and antidote. I would like them back.” Albus stood on the doorstep.

“I used them to find an antidote to Sirius’ sickness.” Craig informed the Headmaster. “If there had been any left, I wouldn’t have given you them back anyway.”

Albus scowled at the healer; it had cost a small fortune to manufacture the new derivative. “Lily, Healer Delaney.” Albus walked away from the house.

Lily closed the door, and leant against it. “Thanks Craig. How is Sirius doing?”

“He’ll be just fine. The Veritaserum Dumbledore used contained hogweed. Apparently Sirius is allergic to it.” Craig shook his head. “Hogweed sap is derived from a plant that can cause severe allergic reactions in some people. I can’t believe Dumbledore was stupid enough to use it on someone without telling them first.”

“I can. He was after Fawkes.” Lily grinned. “Not that he’s going to find him.”

Fawkes was, at that moment, being tended to by Remus Lupin in his apartment in Baker Street.

Lily left Craig and went up to see Sirius who was lying in their bed. “He’s gone.”

Sirius looked awful. "Good. I never touched his dumb bird." His voice sounded sulky.

Lily laughed. Even now, Sirius sometimes still acted like a child. "I know you didn't, but I know who did."

Sirius sat up. "Who?"

Lily sat down next to Sirius and told him exactly how Fawkes had been stolen from under Dumbledore's nose.

Earlier That Day

Poppy had asked Sirius to come in and take another look at Harry Lupin, who had just woken up. After monitoring Harry for a while, Poppy decided to bring Sirius in to do another check on the boy. She was concerned that whatever had afflicted Draco was the same as what Harry had had; her major concern now being the chance of it spreading to any other pupils. Sirius' experience in dealing with contagious diseases was second to none; he had specialized in these areas after seeing their effects firsthand.

Sirius flooded into the Headmaster's office. He wanted to speak to Dumbledore about increasing Poppy's help in the ward at busy times by the loan of trainee healers from St. Mungo's. It would lighten Poppy's load and provide good hands-on experience for the trainee healers. Albus was waiting for him. Both men discussed and agreed upon a schedule that would be beneficial to both parties.

Albus got up. "I'm afraid I have to go. I have a meeting arranged with Professor McGonagall."

Sirius followed Albus down the stairs when he realized that he had forgotten his notes. "I've left my notes on your desk. I'll see you later Albus; I'll need them when I speak to Poppy."

Sirius picked up his notes and then set off for the hospital ward to speak to Harry and Poppy.

Harry looked up as Sirius entered the ward and headed towards him. "Lord Black." His voice sounded raspy.

"Drink this." Sirius lifted the boy up and helped him sip some water out of the glass.

"Why are you here, Sir?" Harry asked, his voice sounding less gruff now that he had lubricated it with the water.

"You don't have to call me Sir or Lord Black. It makes me want to look round for my father. Call me Sirius." Sirius smiled down at his wife's son.

"Thank you. Why are you here, Sirius?" Harry repeated the question.

"Madam Pomfrey asked me to take a look at you now that you have woken up. I saw you when you were first collapsed." Sirius explained.

"Oh." Harry didn't really know what to say. Suddenly a movement around Sirius' neck caught Harry's attention.

Sirius felt the snake unwrap itself from his shoulders and took a step back away from Harry, not wanting to alarm him. "It's okay. Berus is my snake. She won't hurt you."

Harry was fascinated as the black snake slithered down Sirius' arm and placed her head on the bed. "Does she bite?"

"She does, but she won't hurt you, will you baby?" Sirius stroked the snake's head and she hissed softly as she pushed her head against the pressure.

"Can I stroke her?" Harry wanted to touch the snake too.

"Of course." Sirius looked down at his snake. "Berus, be nice to Harry."

The snake slithered across the bed, and up to where Harry was lying back on the pillows. Harry didn't move as she slid up his body and

wrapped herself loosely around his neck; her face just inches from his own.

Harry carefully lifted his hand, and stroked her on her head, talking gently to her. "You are beautiful, aren't you girl?"

Engrossed in stroking the snake, Harry didn't notice Sirius stiffen and look round. Quickly he cast a privacy spell and sat down. "Harry."

Harry looked up from stroking the snake; he thought Sirius looked worried. "Am I doing it wrong?"

Sirius shook his head. "No, you're doing wonderfully. Did you know that you're a parselmouth?"

Harry didn't appear surprised by Sirius' question. "I'm not exactly a parselmouth, I can understand what the snake is saying but I don't know how to speak the language. My friend, Hermione, can though."

"Yes, I heard about that. However, when you were talking to Berus just now, the sounds coming out of your mouth sounded like little hisses, not English." Sirius explained.

"I really thought I was speaking English. I'm going to have to tell Hermione." Harry's face then fell. "If she ever speaks to me again."

"Why, what did you do to her?" Sirius was curious. From what he had heard from Remus, the pair had been good friends since first year.

"I was angry when she got engaged again to someone she didn't know." Harry explained. "I've been pretty much ignoring her ever since."

Sirius smiled. "Well, in that case, you'll be pleased to hear that Madam Pomfrey said that she has been up to visit you every day since you first came in."

Harry's face immediately lit up. "Thanks for telling me Sirius."

Sirius held out his arm. "I'm sorry, Harry, but I've got to speak to Madam Pomfrey before I go back to work. Berus, up you come."

The snake refused to move, hissing angrily at Sirius.

Harry looked happily at Sirius. "She said that she isn't going anywhere. She said that you can fetch her later. She wants to stay with me."

"Thanks, Harry." Turning his attention to the snake, Sirius spoke sternly. "I'll pick you up later today when I come and check on Harry again."

Harry yawned as Sirius cancelled the privacy spells, and then left the room. Berus moved from around Harry's neck and slid under the covers to settle quietly at the bottom of the bed. Harry felt comforted by the weight of the snake against his legs and fell asleep.

Filius entered the ward, and, noticing the bump in Harry's bed, called out to the snake. He watched as she slid from under Harry's bed covers, and up his arm to settle around his neck. Harry was still sleeping and didn't notice the snake's departure. After disillusioning the snake, and popping her under his robes, Filius headed off to the Headmaster's office. Once he reached the entrance to the Headmaster's office, Filius spoke the password to the guardians and they slid back, allowing him entry.

Dumbledore looked up as Filius came in. "Filius, what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to let you know that Harry Lupin has woken up. I've been to see him, and he appears to be sleeping peacefully now." Filius told the Headmaster.

"That's wonderful news. Has Poppy had any luck tracking down what caused the illness in the first place?" Dumbledore asked.

Flitwick shook his head. "We've searched the boys' dormitory looking for something that might have caused this, but came up empty. Poppy suggested moving the second year boys out of the dormitory

and up to the spare room at the top of the tower, just to be on the safe side.”

“I’ll ask the house elves to move everything today.” Dumbledore agreed that it might be a good idea to move the boys until they discovered the cause of the illness.

“Thank you, Headmaster.” Filius turned and left the room, his illegal cargo now safely curled up out of sight under the Headmaster’s desk.

Twenty minutes later, Dumbledore got up and left his office to head for the Great Hall for lunch. Still invisible, Berus slid out from under the desk and moved across the room to the stand where the baby phoenix sat amongst a pile of ashes, chirping playfully. Berus wrapped herself around the thick support of the bird’s stand, and crawled carefully up it until she found herself face to face with the baby phoenix. Hoping that the phoenix could sense her intentions, Berus opened her mouth.

For a moment nothing happened, and then Fawkes slowly moved himself across his perch and disappeared into the waiting void. Berus closed her mouth, and slithered slowly back down the stand and out through the door of the office, which Dumbledore had left open. Slithering down to the bottom of the staircase, Berus settled down to wait. Dumbledore may have left his office door open, but he had instructed the guardians to the staircase to keep the entrance locked until he returned. This meant that Berus was unable to leave until Dumbledore returned.

An hour later, Berus made her way carefully back to the hospital wing, making sure she didn’t jolt her precious cargo. On reaching the hospital wing, she settled down under Harry’s bed.

Harry was awake when his head of house once again came into the hospital wing. “Hello, Sir.”

“Harry, it’s so nice to see you awake and looking better.” Flitwick beamed at the boy. Harry was one of his favorite students.

"I feel much better Professor. When can I come back to class?" Harry was worried about the work he had missed.

"Not for another few days, I'm afraid. You were very sick, and we still need to keep an eye on you." Flitwick didn't move as he felt Berus attach herself around his ankle, and slide up under his robes. "Well, I must be off. I need to pop into Hogsmeade today and want to get back in time for my dinner."

"Thanks for stopping by to see me, Sir." Harry liked his Professor as much as his Professor liked him.

"It was a pleasure, Harry." Flitwick smiled one last time at Harry and left the wing.

Once in Hogsmeade, Flitwick slipped round to the back of the Three Broomsticks, where Remus was waiting.

"Professor Flitwick!" Remus exclaimed at the sight of Felidae's contact from Hogwarts.

"Not so loudly." Flitwick pulled out his wand and cast some privacy spells around the pair.

"Do you have him?" Remus asked anxiously.

Flitwick nodded and waved his wand. A black snake appeared around Flitwick's neck, and opened its mouth. A small, hairless chick sat quietly inside.

Remus reached up and cautiously took the chick from the snake's mouth; he was only too well aware of how dangerous a viper's poison could be. "I can't believe it didn't swallow him."

Flitwick laughed. "Do you really believe I would have entrusted our cargo to a snake that would eat it?"

Remus shook his head. "No. I'd better get going." Remus apparated away and Filius cancelled the spells he had set up.

Disillusioned once more, the snake settled back round Flitwick's neck. The tiny man then headed into Scrivenshaft's to pick up his order of new quills which had arrived a few days ago, and then went to Honeydukes to pick up a supply of chocoballs for Madam Pomfrey. Once back at the school, he took Poppy's supplies to her, and left for his rooms to put away his supplies. Berus had taken the opportunity, during Flitwick's visit to the hospital wing, to return to her original resting place under Harry's bed to await Sirius' return later that day.

The present

"You used me! Why didn't you just tell me?" Sirius wanted to know. He was angry at what Lily had done; after last week's escapade, he thought she might have shown a little more consideration for him.

"Because the fewer people that knew what was happening, the better." Lily told Sirius.

"Thanks. I really enjoyed it." Sirius bit out sarcastically.

Lily stroked his hair. "I'm really sorry, honey. I didn't know that Dumbledore would put you through this."

Sirius let out a breath. "I know. What are you going to do with Fawkes?"

Lily knew Sirius wasn't going to like it. "We're going to take him to Glastonbury in the morning."

"Whose we?" Sirius had a feeling he already knew.

"Me and Remus." Lily knew Sirius still didn't trust his old friend.

"Can't he do it alone?" Sirius whined.

"No, he can't. One of us needs to drop Fawkes into the water, while the other one does the spell." Lily snapped; her nerves were feeling a little frayed, and she hated it when Sirius was in one of his moods.

“Okay, okay. Why are you going to Glastonbury to do it, and what’s with the water?” Sirius asked.

Lily told him about the plan that Felidae had come up with.

“I’ve got to go. I want to go over things with Remus one more time before tomorrow.” Lily kissed Sirius on his forehead, and got up.

“I’ll see you later then.” Sirius tried to keep the petulance out of his tone.

“You will.” With that Lily disappeared.

Glastonbury

Lily and Remus appeared behind the bookstore on Chalice Hill, which was a short walk away from Chalice Well, where they were going to be performing the ritual.

Disillusioning themselves, the pair walked to where the Well was situated and sat down to wait for sunrise. Even though the garden where the Well was located wasn’t yet open to the public, neither spoke, not wanting to disturb the serenity of the place they now stood in.

Lily checked her watch. After casting privacy spells around the area, and dropping her disillusionment spell, Lily carefully lifted Fawkes out of the box she had popped him in. Fawkes chirped happily at her, pushing his little head against her hand. Remus smiled at the sight. Lily then cast another spell, and the lid covering the wellhead raised itself to allow her access to the well shaft.

As the alarm on her muggle watch went off, Lily dropped the defenseless chick down into the well while Remus waved his wand through the air and chanted the same words over and over again. “Evolvo Libera Vaco, Regenero Hodie.”

Lily held her breath and hoped that they were doing the right thing. Moments later Fawkes burst into existence above the well, his fiery visage almost too bright to look at. As the flames surrounding him

died down, Lily reached out and caught him before he dropped to the ground, once more a defenseless hatchling, chirping happily at her.

She turned to Remus who had now stopped chanting. "I think it worked."

"I hope so." Remus put his arm around Lily and apparated all three of them back to his apartment.

Hogwarts

Just as Lily and Remus apparated away from Glastonbury, the girl took out the diary, and opened it to write to her new friend. "Good morning, Tom..."

I lied! Christmas is coming up next chapter. Sorry, this chapter had a life of its own, and I would never have gotten it posted before the weekend if I had included Christmas.

To all of those who have medical training, I apologize. I know nothing about brains etc. The same apologies to those who have knowledge of Latin – sorry for mangling it!

Next chapter: Harry and Hermione have a chat. Christmas arrives. Fawkes finds a new companion. Hopefully I will post by next Tuesday, but no promises as I have an exam that day.

Chapter 24: Confessions and Christmas

6 December 1992

Hermione cast Tempus and looked at the time and noted that she had just enough time to visit Harry before breakfast. She made her way up to the hospital ward, only to come to a halt at the sight of Harry sitting up in bed. "Oh, you're up. I didn't expect you to be awake yet."

Harry smiled tentatively at Hermione. "I woke up yesterday."

Hermione stood unmoving at the door. "Perhaps I'd better go."

"Hermione, please stay. I need to talk to you." Harry looked beseechingly at his best friend.

Letting the door swing shut behind her, Hermione entered the ward and sat down by Harry's bed.

Harry knew he had a lot of work to do to try and make things right with Hermione. "I want to say how sorry I am for acting like an idiot about the whole marriage thing."

"But why, Harry? I thought you'd be happy that I didn't have to marry Nott." Hermione pointed out.

Harry picked uncomfortably at his sheets. "I'd rather not say."

Hermione got up. "Well in that case, I'll just go then."

"I was jealous." Harry blurted out, not wanting Hermione to leave. "You're my best friend and I wanted to be the one who you turned to for help. When you first told me about Nott, I was upset because you said you wanted to be on your own and that I couldn't do anything to help you. I was really angry when I found out that you had gotten engaged to someone you didn't even know."

Hermione knew what it must have cost Harry to admit to this. "Oh, Harry. I'm sorry, but I didn't think you could help me; getting engaged

to Felidae was my only option for escaping from an unwanted marriage to Nott.”

Harry decided to tell Hermione about what he had done to try and get her out of her arranged marriage. “What you don’t know is that I tried to get you out of your marriage with Nott. When you told me that you wouldn’t have any choice but to marry him, I wrote to my Dad asking if he knew how to get you out of the marriage. I told him if he couldn’t do anything, then I was going to offer to marry you myself. Dad wrote back saying that he couldn’t let me do that and that you had already received and accepted an offer from a friend of his. That was when I dragged you down to the lake and why I was so ghastly to you. I felt so disappointed that I could do nothing for you. I’m sorry, I was such an idiot.

Hermione was really touched, even though she already knew most of what Harry was telling her. “Harry, I understand and I think it’s wonderful that you would do that for me.”

“Not that it matters any more. You’re still going to marry that Venant guy.” Harry looked miserable.

Hermione was frustrated that she couldn’t tell Harry the truth. “You don’t know what might happen in the future though. Perhaps I won’t have to marry Venant.”

“Hermione, it’s okay. You don’t have to try and make me feel better. As long as he makes you happy, then I’ll be happy.” Harry lied.

“Thanks, Harry.” Hermione felt sure Harry was lying, but she didn’t press the point.

“Anyway, my Dad was probably right. I am too young to be thinking about marriage just yet.” Harry was now starting to feel very uncomfortable about the whole marriage subject. “Do you think we could talk about something different now?”

“Of course, we can. What are you doing for Christmas?” Hermione diplomatically asked.

“Luna and her uncle are coming for dinner. Apparently Mum gets on really well with Uncle Grim, as the girls call him.” Harry told Hermione. “What are you doing?”

“Going home to Snape Manor.” Hermione was looking forward to seeing the rest of her family.

“Do you think you might be able to visit for a few days before we return to school?” Harry was starting to feel more relaxed now that the conversation had returned to more neutral territory.

“I don’t know. I’ll have to ask Papa.” Hermione knew her father hated Christmas, so she was hopeful that he wouldn’t mind if she went to stay at Harry’s after the actual celebration. The thought of being able to meet Grimstock was more than a little tempting.

Harry then slapped his head. “I nearly forgot the most important thing I needed to talk to you about.”

Hermione thought Harry was talking about his missing schoolwork. “Don’t worry, you can borrow all of my notes to catch up on what you’ve missed in lessons.”

“Thanks, but that’s not what I needed to talk to you about. Hermione, I’m a parselmouth.” Harry said in a matter of fact tone.

“Please tell me you’re not joking.” Hermione couldn’t believe that Harry would be cruel enough to tease her about such a sensitive subject.

Harry shook his head. “Of course I’m not joking. Sirius came to see me...”

“Sirius?” Hermione interrupted.

“Lord Black. Madam Pomfrey had him come in and look at me.” Harry explained.

“I assumed you meant Lord Black. I just wondered why you were calling him Sirius and not Lord Black.” Hermione clarified.

"He asked me to. He doesn't like being called Lord Black. Anyhow, when he came to see me, he had his pet snake with him." Harry was again interrupted.

"Lord Black has a pet snake?" Hermione was surprised.

"Yes. She's called Berus and I think she's a viper. Sirius said she bites but wouldn't hurt me. Berus let me pet her. When I was talking to her, Sirius said that I wasn't speaking English. That was when I found out that I could not only understand parseltongue, but speak it too." Harry finished his tale.

"But why didn't you say that you were a parselmouth when the snake bit Potter and I spoke to it?" Hermione asked.

"I didn't realize at the time that I could speak parseltongue, let alone understand it. When you shouted at the snake, I just thought you were speaking English. It wasn't until everyone started talking about you being a parselmouth that I realized that I must be able to understand the language." Harry looked a little sheepish.

"But you could have told me when you realized. I wouldn't have said anything to anyone." Hermione was hurt that Harry hadn't trusted her enough to tell her.

"I didn't want to admit to myself that I could understand the language, let alone tell anyone else. When I finally did tell someone, he told me not to tell anyone." Harry needed to talk to someone about the diary, and he couldn't think of anyone he would rather tell than Hermione.

"Was it Draco?" Hermione knew that Harry had grown quite close to Draco over the last month.

Harry shook his head. "No, it was Tom."

"Who's Tom?" Hermione couldn't think of anyone by that name at the school.

“Hermione, you’ve got to swear not to tell anyone about what I am about to tell you.” Harry begged, suddenly looking scared.

“I promise I won’t.” Hermione agreed.

Harry then proceeded to tell Hermione about Draco, the diary, Pansy and Tom. “Things began to change between us after we discussed the Chamber of Secrets. I’d asked Tom if he knew anything about it. He explained to me that the Chamber had been opened before, and that he wanted to show me something.”

“How can a diary show you something?” Hermione asked.

“I don’t know, but somehow, the next thing I knew, I was standing in Hogwarts but it was years ago; I saw Dumbledore and he looked much younger. There was also a boy there who I thought must have been Tom. I followed him to a room where he confronted our groundskeeper, Hagrid, who was just a pupil then, about how things had to stop. There was a tussle and a huge spider came scuttling out of the room. The next thing I knew, I was sitting back on my bed, the diary lying open in front of me. I was really scared, and hid the diary under my bed.

I couldn’t ignore the diary though, and decided that I needed to write to Tom again. When I next wrote in the diary, Tom told me that the giant spider I’d seen was a pet that Hagrid had been keeping and that it had been the monster from the Chamber of Secrets. Tom told me that Hagrid was expelled and the attacks stopped, but not before a girl died. I told Tom that I didn’t believe that he had got it right; that I didn’t think Hagrid would ever hurt anyone.” Harry shook his head at the memory.

“I don’t think he could have either. Headmaster Dumbledore would never have employed him if he’d been responsible for the death of a student. How did Tom react?” Hermione asked.

Harry continued with his story. “He stopped writing to me, so I just shoved the diary under my bed. Eventually, however, I was desperate to write in the diary again, but I didn’t get a chance as it disappeared about a week before I collapsed.”

“Do you have any idea where it disappeared to, Harry?” Hermione was horrified by what Harry had told her. She knew that some diaries were enchanted to talk back to you, but Harry’s description of the diary he and Draco had had, went far beyond that.

“I don’t. The last time I saw the diary, my need to write in it had gotten almost unbearable but Draco and the other boys had been in our dormitory, and I couldn’t write in it with everyone watching. I took the diary with me to the library, but by the time I got there it had gone. I searched all the way back to Ravenclaw tower, the common room and the dormitory but it had just vanished.” Harry was glad he had finally been able to tell someone.

“Do you think Draco took it back?” Hermione wondered.

Harry shook his head. “No, I put the diary in my book bag. When I left the dormitory, Draco was asleep on his bed, and he was still there when I ran back.”

Hermione thought for a moment. “Harry, you must tell someone about the diary. It sounds dangerous.”

“Do you think I tried to hurt, Pansy?” Harry vocalized his deepest fear.

Hermione nodded reluctantly. “I do, but I think the diary may have influenced you.”

“I didn’t mean to. I don’t remember doing anything.” Harry was nearly in tears.

“Harry, it’s okay. You’ve got to tell a teacher though before someone else gets hurt.” Hermione pleaded.

Harry knew Hermione was right and nodded. “Can we tell your Dad? I should be out of here today.”

At that moment the two of them were interrupted by Sirius Black who came out of the nurse’s office, and walked up to Harry’s bed.

“Harry, you’re looking much better. I would just like to do one last check of you, and if everything seems okay, you can return to your dormitory.” Sirius smiled brightly at the boy who looked anxiously at him.

“Thank you, Lord... I mean Sirius. Sirius, this is Hermione Snape.” Harry then turned to Hermione. “Hermione, this is Sirius Black.”

The pair exchanged reserved pleasantries, and Harry had the feeling that the two of them weren’t going to be the best of friends.

Sirius turned to Hermione. “Miss Snape, would you excuse us whilst I examine Harry?”

Glad to escape from Sirius’ presence, Hermione got up. “I’ll sit over by the window and wait for you, Harry.”

Sirius finished examining Harry, and then left without saying anything further to Hermione. Having been allowed to leave, Harry got dressed and called to Hermione. “I need to go to Ravenclaw tower before we see your dad. I’ve got a book that I want to return to him.”

The two headed up to Ravenclaw tower. On their way back downstairs to the dungeons, Harry stopped at the entrance to the second floor. “I want to take a look in the bathroom where Pansy was found. Perhaps it might help me remember something.”

Hermione nodded. “Okay, let’s go.”

The two children moved quietly up the corridor and slipped into the unused girls’ bathroom. Harry looked around.

“Do you recall anything?” Hermione asked; she shivered a little, the bathroom wasn’t exactly welcoming.

Frustrated, Harry shook his head. “No, I don’t.”

At that moment, a translucent girl appeared from beneath one of the closed toilet doors, making the pair of them jump. “Hello again.”

“You’ve seen us before?” Harry asked.

The girl shook her head. “Not her, just you. You were in here the same day that they found that girl.”

“Did you see what happened to her?” Hermione asked.

“No, I was hiding in the u-bend.” The girl explained.

Hermione suddenly snapped her fingers. “You’re Moaning Myrtle, aren’t you?”

“I think you’re awfully rude calling me that.” Myrtle told Hermione, her lip quivering.

“Hello, Myrtle, I’m Harry.” Harry politely held out his hand.

Myrtle stuck out her tongue at Hermione, and tried to shake Harry’s hand. “Hi Harry.”

Harry felt as if someone had plunged his hand into ice water; Myrtle’s handshake was freezing. “Myrtle, did you see what I was doing in here?”

Before Myrtle could answer, a noise from outside the bathroom alerted the pair to the fact that someone was outside. They both froze until they heard the person moving away.

“That was close. Myrtle...” Harry looked round, Myrtle had gone, a puddle of water coming from one of the stalls the only evidence that she had even been there at all.

“Come on, Harry. It’s not very nice in here, and we don’t want to get caught in this bathroom.” Hermione pulled Harry out of the room, as he cast one final glance at the room.

As they walked along the corridor, Hermione turned to Harry. “Harry, now you’ve looked, can we please tell my father about the diary?”

Harry nodded. He hadn't found anything out, and was now at a loss as to what else he could do. "Okay."

They headed off to Severus' rooms, unaware that they were being watched.

The girl slipped into the bathroom before heading off to her dormitory, and opening up a black leather bound diary.

"Tom, are you there?"

"Yes. Is something wrong?"

"Hermione Snape and Harry Lupin were in the bathroom. I heard them talking about a diary; I think it might be this diary. They're going to go to Professor Snape about it."

"Did you get the scarf?"

"Yes, I got it before I came back up here."

"Good. Next time, try not to drop anything."

"Sorry, Tom. Can you teach me some more spells now?"

"Not right now. We need to make sure that this diary isn't discovered. I have the feeling that Lupin's trip to Snape may result in a search. You need to wrap the diary up and send it to yourself at home. You can collect it at Christmas."

"But Christmas is over two weeks' away. What will I do without you to write to until then?"

"Perhaps you might be right. Take the diary and hide it in the secret room I showed you. You can go to the room when you need to write to me."

"Okay, I'll do it now."

Inside the diary Tom was pleased that the girl had dropped her scarf in the bathroom, despite his initial anger at her stupidity. If she hadn't dropped the scarf, then she never would have heard Lupin's plan to confess to his teacher about the diary.

Tom was glad that the diary had fallen into the hands of this particular girl. When he had felt his control of Harry growing weaker, he had come up with the idea of showing Harry the supposed monster from the Chamber, but the idea had backfired with Harry becoming reluctant to believe that Hagrid could have been the perpetrator. Realizing that Harry was probably going to be a lost cause, Tom possessed Harry for one final time. He had then taken the opportunity to drop the diary where he knew it would be found. He had been elated when the girl had picked it up and started to write in it. She was turning out to be far easier to control than either Draco or Harry had been.

Instead of possessing the girl's body, Tom had decided to use the magnetism of his personality to draw her in. Flattered by his attentions, and feeling neglected by her boyfriend, the girl had easily fallen under his sway, particularly once he had offered to teach her some spells to make life easier for her. It had taken him less than a week to draw her further in with darker and darker spells. Tom knew that the only problem with dark magic was that some people were more susceptible to its addictive nature than others. It appeared that the girl was particularly vulnerable to its pull, and now that she was hooked, Tom knew she would do almost anything to feed her addiction, including opening the chamber to allow his pet out. A memory he had implanted had let her believe she knew just two words in parseltongue – 'open' and 'close'.

Knowing the girl would do as she had been told, Tom settled down to wait. Eventually he would be strong enough to escape from the diary.

Harry and Hermione left Severus' rooms and headed off in separate directions to their own houses. Severus now had an idea of what had caused both Harry's and Draco's illnesses. Severus knew that anything as heinous as the diary had to be saturated with dark magic, and, once the two boys had been denied access to the diary, they had eventually collapsed with withdrawal symptoms.

Severus hadn't told the two children but he was familiar with the name Tom Riddle and who Riddle had become. Needing to see if Tom had told Harry more than Harry could remember, Severus had tried to access Harry's mind but had been unable to get in; Harry's natural defenses now seemed impermeable. Severus had sent the two children off to their own houses with warnings not to discuss the diary with anyone else. After what he had found out, Severus knew he had little choice but to go to the Headmaster. Getting up he headed for Dumbledore's office.

"Come in, Severus." Dumbledore wondered what Severus could want with him.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, but I have made a discovery relating to Mr. Lupin and Mr. Black's illnesses." Severus explained.

"And that is?" Dumbledore asked.

Severus then explained the diary and its nature. "...so I think we had better make a search for the diary."

"I agree. It is far too dangerous to be left in the hands of a student." Dumbledore told his potions master. "I will arrange for the house elves to look. They are the most discreet way of checking. We don't want to cause a panic."

Severus would have preferred to make a search of Slytherin himself, but had little choice except to go along with Dumbledore's preference. "Of course, Headmaster. I'll be getting back then."

"Thank you for letting me know, Severus." Albus watched as Severus left the room, and then called for one of the house elves to arrange for a search of the school.

Two hours later the house elf returned empty handed. Albus pondered the missing diary. He already suspected what the Chamber held, and what had attacked the children who had been petrified. Now that he knew about the diary, Albus was convinced that Tom was controlling its owner, and forcing them to open the Chamber.

Albus also suspected that the diary might be a horcrux; it had all the familiar hallmarks of one, and he should know. Despite his concern at the possible use the diary had been put to, Albus couldn't help but be impressed at Tom's likely achievement at such a young age. His own first attempt at making a horcrux had been ruined by Grindelwald, who had destroyed it. He hadn't had a chance to make another one at that time, not with his war efforts and trying to maintain a respectable job at Hogwarts at the same time.

Albus had waited many years before trying again, and his second attempt had gone much better. Frank Longbottom had been getting too close to the truth about him, and Neville was now fatherless because of it. What pleased him the most though, was that he had framed the Lestranges for Frank's murder, getting rid of three obstacles at the same time. Albus smiled at his own genius.

Opening up the Marauders' Map, Albus scanned it to see if he could spot anything amiss or anyone missing. After checking, Dumbledore closed it, before running a hand over the parchment. He decided that perhaps it was time to pass the Map on to a new owner.

Later that evening

Fawkes stared balefully at Sirius as he sat eating his dinner.

"Do we have to have that bloody bird at the dinner table?" Sirius snapped irritably at Lily; the damn thing made him feel on edge, staring all the time.

Lily turned to Remus. "Could you take him with you tonight?"

Remus called to the bird, and Fawkes flew over, settling softly on Remus' shoulder. "Of course, I can. In fact I must be off. I just wanted to find out what the latest position was with Harry. Now I can tell Nia he's just fine."

With that, Remus headed for the fireplace, and flooed out. Lily turned to Sirius.

“What is your problem with Fawkes? It’s not like he attacked you or anything.” Lily couldn’t understand why her husband didn’t like the bird.

“I’m just not a big fan of birds. You know that.” Sirius pointed out.

Lily knew that Sirius had a thing about birds, but she hadn’t expected him to act so negatively towards Fawkes. “Fine; I’ll ask Remus to keep him at his place from now on.”

“Thank you.” Sirius, having finished his meal, put down his napkin and left to go to his study. He had a lot of paperwork to catch up with and didn’t want it still sitting on his desk when he returned to work in the morning.

Lily went to check on the children, who had been having dinner in their playroom. None of them really liked fish, so Lily had arranged for them to have toad-in-the-hole and mashed potatoes in their room. All three children jumped up when their mother came in.

“Look Mummy, it’s a pretty bird.” Cassie pointed out Fawkes, who had suddenly appeared in the children’s bedroom.

Lily sighed. “Fawkes, you’re supposed to be with Remus. Sirius will have a fit if he sees you in here.”

Fawkes chirped happily at Lilly, and then disappeared.

“I think he likes you, Mum”. Orion pointed out.

“I like him too.” Lily told the children, before leaving the room. “Just don’t tell your father he was here. Now off to bed with you.

Cassie followed Lily back down to the sitting room. “Cassie, you’re supposed to be going to bed.”

“But the pretty bird asked me to tell you something.” Cassie explained her failure to go to bed to her mother.

Lily hid her smile; Cassie had been having imaginary conversations with her dolls ever since she was really tiny. "What did Fawkes say?"

"That he's going never going to leave us." Cassie smiled happily at her mother, not realizing the implications behind Fawkes' comment.

"Sweetie, did Fawkes really say that?" Lily needed to make sure that it wasn't just Cassie's imagination.

Cassie nodded enthusiastically. "Yes, Mummy."

Lily sat down. If Cassie had it right, then she had a feeling that Fawkes had bonded to someone in the family. "Did Fawkes say anything else, Cassie?"

Cassie explained. "No, Mummy."

"Cassie, you can't tell anyone about this. It has to be our secret." Lily knew there would be trouble if Dumbledore discovered what had happened to his phoenix, and she didn't want her daughter in the firing line.

"Okay, Mummy. I promise I won't tell." Cassie looked intently at her mother as she made her vow.

"Thanks sweetie. I think it's time for bed now." Lily picked Cassie up and took her upstairs, thinking about what her daughter had told her. She wondered why Fawkes couldn't have just told her himself.

12th December 1992

Ginny Prewett sat down in the Slytherin common room. Theresa and Valerie were still sleeping, and Ginny decided to take advantage of their absence. She really liked her friends, but sometimes she just wanted to spend a little time on her own. She soon realized that maybe she wasn't going to get the time alone she craved after all.

"Ginevra, how are you?" Blaise slid into a seat next to Ginny.

"I'm fine Blaise; I was just about to get some studying done." Ginny lied.

Blaise raised an eyebrow. "Without any books? If you want me to go away, I will." He started to get up, only for Ginny to stop him.

"Please stay. You're right. I'm not going to be studying. I just wanted some peace and quiet." Ginny didn't look abashed; it took more than being caught out in a small lie to embarrass her.

"I understand. Sometimes I feel the same way. Before I go, I wanted to know if you would like to come and stay with me and my mother this Christmas." Blaise's mother had ordered him to ask Ginny to come and stay; she wanted to look Ginny over, before she gave Blaise permission to eventually start dating the girl.

Ginny could have screamed in frustration. "I'm supposed to be going home. Mother is going to be alone this Christmas with Ron being petrified in the hospital wing." She had started calling her mum 'Mother' after hearing most of the other Slytherins refer to their parents as mother and father; she hadn't want to stand out as being unrefined.

Blaise was disappointed. He knew that there was no way his mother would put up with Molly Prewett. "I'm sorry to hear that. Perhaps another time." Blaise got up and kissed Ginny's hand, about to leave.

"Let me write to Mother; perhaps she will change her mind." Ginny suggested, trying to keep the desperation she was feeling out of her voice. She really didn't want to miss out on a chance to visit the infamous Zabini home.

"I'll wait to hear from you then." Blaise hid his smile, and walked off.

Two days later

"Blaise." Ginny spotted the boy she was looking for leaning up against the fireplace, talking to one of the third year girls, Isabella Porter.

Blaise looked up and saw Ginny heading his way. He softly murmured something to Isobella, who blushed, before lazily pushing himself away from the fireplace and approaching Ginny. "Ginevra, what can I do for you?"

"I've written to my mother, and she's said that I can visit after all." Ginny hoped she wasn't too late.

"Good." Blaise knew his mother would be pleased. "I've spoken to my mother and she has said that if your mother agrees, then you should be ready to join us on the 27th. Apparently we are going to be staying with family until then."

Ginny had hoped to be able to spend Christmas Day with Blaise, but hid her disappointment well. "Thank you. Mother will be pleased that I'll be able to spend some time with her."

"I'll send a portkey for you by owl the day before." Blaise was aware that Ginny was disappointed, but he was telling the truth. His mother had arranged to stay with their family in Italy until the 26th, which would give them enough time to get back home to make sure that everything would be ready for Ginny's arrival. Even though his family had more than enough servants to do the work, his mother still liked to make sure that everything was just so herself.

"Thanks, Blaise." Ginny walked off smiling.

Blaise returned to his original position and started talking to Isobella again. It didn't hurt to have more than one available option.

19th December 1992

Harry had nearly finished packing so that he would be ready to go on Monday morning. He wasn't taking the train to London, and Remus would be collecting him, Dudley and Luna from the school gates. Checking the time, Harry realized that he was supposed to be in the library meeting Hermione. Quickly he finished packing and headed out of the dormitory.

On entering the library, Harry spotted Hermione buried beneath a mass of books. "Hermione, school's over. Everyone's going home on Monday."

"I know. I was doing some research into the Chamber of Secrets. I was trying to work out what type of spider Hagrid had been keeping before he was expelled. There's only one large type of spider that I can find and that's an acromantula. However, unless they are fully grown, they aren't capable of killing anyone; their venom just isn't poisonous enough until then." Hermione looked frustrated. "I also can't find anything about petrification either."

"Petrification?" Harry queried.

Hermione slammed the book she had been reading shut. "Yes. There still must be a monster down in the Chamber, otherwise there wouldn't have been any attacks at all. I can't find anything that says acromantulas are capable of petrification."

"Has your Dad said anything about finding the diary?" Harry asked the question that had been gnawing at him all morning.

"No. Apparently Headmaster Dumbledore did a search but was unable to find anything." Hermione answered.

"Damn. I was hoping that it would turn up." Harry looked worried.

"Harry, forget about it. You've done all you can." Hermione didn't want Harry spending the whole of Christmas worrying about the diary.

"I know. When Draco and I spoke to the Headmaster, he said that it wasn't our fault and that we shouldn't blame ourselves." Harry still didn't seem convinced.

"Harry, he's right. Nobody's died and everyone will be back to normal before you know it. You have to admit, it's been great not having Prewett around." Hermione smiled mischievously.

Harry laughed. "That's true. Look, I promise I'll try and forget about it."

Hermione was pleased. "Good. Have you heard from your Dad about the arrangements for Boxing Day yet?"

"Yes, he wrote to me yesterday. He said that he will meet you at the Three Broomsticks at midday. I think he wants to give you the third degree before bringing you home."

Hermione looked worried. "What if he hates me?"

"He won't. He's really very nice." Harry tried to reassure his friend.

"Why can't you come and get me?" Hermione asked.

"Because Dad said that we are having a big dinner party that day and Mum will need all the help she can get. Dad is the only one who can apparate to collect you." Harry explained.

Hermione relaxed. "If he's apparating, then he won't have much time to question me."

"Hermione, everything will be fine." Harry decided to try and take Hermione's mind off meeting his Dad. "Pass me one of those books and we can have another look to try and work out what it is that is hiding down in the Chamber."

Falling for Harry's ploy, Hermione grabbed one of the books she hadn't looked through yet and the two of them settled down to try to get some research done before lunch.

Christmas Day

Harry was glad it was time for bed. He had had a tiring day. The Lupins and the Lovegoods had all gotten along well together. Dudley had now formally asked Luna to be his girlfriend, and she had said yes, so Dudley was really happy. His Mum and Dad had been acting a bit strangely though, and at one point, Harry had found his Mum in tears in the kitchen. When he'd questioned her about it, she'd said that she had a bit of a headache but that she would be alright.

“Harry, please come into my study.” Remus stopped Harry on his way up the stairs to his room.

Harry reluctantly turned around, and headed back downstairs, and into Remus’ study. “Have I done something wrong?”

Remus shook his head. “No. I just need to speak to you about something important. Take a seat.”

Harry sat down and looked expectantly at his father.

The Alliance had discussed the problem of who should tell the two boys the truth about Harry, and it had been decided that both Lily and Nia would be far too emotional, meaning that Sirius and Remus had been volunteered for the job. Now the time to tell Harry about Lily was here, Remus wasn’t really sure how to go about it, and he wondered whether he had made a mistake in not letting Nia tell Harry instead. Realizing, however, that he couldn’t just stand there saying nothing, Remus took a deep breath and began. “Harry, there’s no easy way to say this, but we found out recently that your birth mother didn’t give you away, as your Mum and I thought, and now she wants to see you.”

Harry voiced the first thought that came into his head. “What made you both think she didn’t want me?”

“Harry, before I tell you that, there’s something else you need to hear first.” Remus spoke gently.

“Okay.” Harry wondered what other bombshell Remus could be about to drop on him.

“Harry, your birth parents were James and Lily Potter. You were there on the night Voldemort was vanquished by Jamie Potter.” Remus began, only for Harry to interrupt him.

“Oh Merlin. So Lily is my mother and I am related to Potter.” Harry was still horrified at the thought of being related to Jamie Potter; something he hadn’t really wanted to deal with if it turned out that Lily truly was his mother.

“Why did you think Lily might be your mother?” Remus couldn’t work out how Harry could have found out.

“I found an old photo of her and Mum in the attic that was in a frame which said sisters. I thought she looked a little like me.” Harry explained, omitting any mention of Severus and his tale of Lily.

“Well you were right.” Remus confirmed. “What you don’t know is that you and Jamie Potter are twins, Harry.”

Harry had suspected that they might be, but again he didn’t want to tell Remus about Severus’ confession about Lily, so he did his best to look surprised. “I can’t believe it. So it’s true that there was another twin, and it was me?”

Remus nodded. “Yes, there’s more. Your Mum and I were going to tell you on your thirteenth birthday that you were actually a Potter. We would have told you before then, but we didn’t want to burden you with the duties that would come with telling you.”

“What duties?” Harry was puzzled.

“Harry, you’re not only a Potter, but you’re the elder Potter twin, meaning that on James’ death, you inherited the Potter titles, land, houses and wealth. On your thirteenth birthday you become entitled to wear the Potter family ring and you will have access to the lower Potter vaults. Up until now, only your mother and I, as your guardians could have gotten into them. You will be able to get into all of the Potter vaults on your seventeenth birthday or if you marry before then.” Remus realized how much of a shock this was to Harry, by the stunned expression on his face.

Having being tutored in pureblood history by Remus, Harry was more than aware of the titles held by James Potter. “Do you mean to say then that I’m the Duke of Harbridge, and not Potter?”

Remus nodded. “Yes, your full title is Harry Remus Lupin-Potter, Duke of Harbridge, Earl of Kingslane.”

“Wow.” Harry was stunned. “Can I still just be called Harry Lupin rather than going by the full title?”

“You can, even though your surname has always been Lupin-Potter. Your mother and I decided to just use the surname Lupin when we enrolled you in school.” Remus explained.

“Does that mean everyone knows my real surname?” Harry asked.

Remus shook his head. “I have a friend in the Ministry who arranged for your records to be sealed permanently. Even the school book at Hogwarts was altered to hide your true name. As far as everyone is concerned, you are actually just ordinary Harry Lupin. In fact, we think it best if you keep it that way.”

“Why?” Harry wanted to know.

“Because we don’t want our family subjected to the same publicity as the Blacks are.” Remus had wanted to tell Harry the truth about Dumbledore and the chance that Harry could actually be the Boy Who Lived but the Alliance had overruled him.

“If I get all the land, titles and houses, then what does Jamie get?” Harry was curious. “It doesn’t seem fair that he’ll get nothing.”

“James left him roughly a million galleons.” Remus explained.

Harry did a quick calculation in his head. “That’s about five million pounds. He’s going to be really rich.”

“Not as rich as you though. As far as we know, the Potter fortune stands at around 40 to 50 million galleons, and that’s just cash. There are other assets as well, including three houses; Potter Manor in Harbridge, Potter Hall in Kingslane, and a townhouse in Grimmauld Square in London.” Remus told Harry.

“Where’s Jamie going to live?” Harry asked.

“Well, you could let him use one of the Potter properties but that’s hardly a problem at the moment. His father owns a townhouse in

Grimmauld Place, just around the corner from your own London house, as well as a few other homes scattered around the British Isles. Don't worry yourself about things like that just yet; Jamie isn't suddenly going to be homeless." Remus was surprised at Harry's concern for Jamie, particularly as he knew Harry didn't really like his brother.

"I still think I should offer to let Jamie use one of the properties; it's only fair. After all, I'm going to be getting everything he expected to get. I still don't know what to say. I can't believe that I'm really rich." Harry was still in shock.

"Well you are. No struggling through life for you." Remus grinned.

Harry was aware that sometimes his parents had found it difficult to make ends meet. "Why didn't you use the Potter money to help instead of working all the time to get by, Dad?"

"It's yours. It would have been wrong for me and your Mum to take it." They hadn't want to touch what he and Nia had felt wasn't rightfully their money.

"But I want you to have some." Harry didn't want to see his parents struggle any more.

"Harry, we're comfortably off now. I enjoy working and don't want to give it up." Remus explained, not wanting to tell Harry the real reason behind his working in London.

Taking his Dad's explanation at face value, Harry smiled. "If you ever need some money though, Dad, you have to take it."

"Thanks, Harry." Remus knew that he would never touch Harry's money.

"Dad, why did you think that Lily didn't want me any more, and why didn't she come looking for me?" Harry returned to his first question; he remembered what Severus had suspected to be the truth but Harry wanted to know exactly what had actually happened, and why his birth mother had abandoned him.

“There was a mix-up at St. Mungo’s. Lily was told that you had died. Instead you were sent here to be looked after by your mother, who was told that Lily didn’t want you.” Remus stuck to the story that had been agreed on by the Alliance.

The Alliance felt that Dumbledore would only be a threat to Harry if Dumbledore believed that Harry knew the truth about his deliberate deception. Knowing that the truth would eventually come out though, it was agreed that Lily would write to Dumbledore about her discovery in order to gauge his reaction before the boys returned to school in January.

Harry suddenly looked worried. “I don’t have to go and live with Lily do I?”

Remus shook his head. “No. Lily has agreed that she won’t try and take you from us.”

“Do I have to see her yet?” Now that he had found out that Lily really was his mother, Harry wasn’t sure how he actually felt about meeting her.

“No, it’s up to you to when you meet her.” Remus put his son’s most imminent fears to rest.

Harry suddenly got up. “Actually, I’d like to talk to Mum. Can I be excused?”

Remus hugged his son before giving him permission to leave. “You can go. We can discuss this further tomorrow if you need to talk about it.”

“Thanks Dad.” Harry headed out of the room to look for his mother.

Nia was sitting in front of the fire, a cup of tea in her hand, and she looked up as Harry came towards her. “Harry, are you alright?”

Harry shook his head and burst into tears. Nia jumped up immediately, the teacup falling to the floor unheeded, and pulled Harry into her arms. "It's going to be okay, Harry."

Harry cried for a while, and then pulled himself together. "Sorry. It's just been a bit of a shock."

Nia wiped Harry's tears away. "Harry, it's okay. I understand it must be hard for you to find out about your mum like that."

Harry interrupted her. "Lily's not my mum. You'll always be my Mum."

Nia felt her spirits lift at Harry's statement, but she knew that she would still have to defend her sister's position. "Harry, I'm glad you think of me as your mum but Lily is still your mother. I know how I would feel if one of my children was taken from me and I had been told they were dead, only to discover that someone had given them away to my sister. I would fight tooth and nail to get them back."

"Dad said I don't have to see her until I want to." Harry sounded panicked.

"You don't, but please think about seeing her." Nia hugged her son. She had been so frightened when Remus had told her the truth. She had dreaded when Harry would eventually find out about Lily; she had been worried that he would want Lily instead of her. She had been glad that Remus had been the one to tell him; she didn't think that she could have done it.

"I promise. I'm off to bed now." Harry kissed Nia goodnight and left the room.

Nia picked up her teacup and headed for the study to talk to Remus.

The next day

Harry looked at the clock. He couldn't believe that it was nearly time for Hermione to arrive. His parents had invited the Weasleys and the Lovegoods to dinner that night, and, since his mum couldn't do magic, and refused to let anyone make her food that way, all five Lupin

children and Luna had been roped in to give her hand to prepare the meal.

Remus checked over the dining room, which had been temporarily enlarged in order to fit everyone in, before apparating to Hogsmeade to collect Hermione.

“Remus, can I get you something to drink?” Rosmerta hustled up to Remus as he walked into the pub.

Remus checked the time. “I’m expecting a friend of Harry’s, but I think I have time for a wizarding ale.”

Rosmerta fetched Remus his drink, and he sat down to watch the patrons of the pub go about their business. He’d just finished his ale when the fireplace flared up and a bushy haired girl stepped out.

“Miss Snape, I presume.” Remus walked up to the girl and held out his hand.

“Mr. Lupin. I’m pleased to meet you.” Hermione thought Remus had a nice firm handshake. “Please call me Hermione.”

“Hermione, I’m a little sorry you’re on time. The house is in chaos at the moment. We’re having a lot of people over for dinner tonight, and Nia is busy roping everyone into helping. It was nice to be able to escape.” Remus smiled conspiratorially at Hermione.

“I’m not very good at cooking but I’d like to help.” Hermione offered.

Remus shook his head. “Nia has promised Harry that he can spend a few hours with you before everyone arrives for dinner.”

Remus then apparated Hermione to the garden of Darcy Cottage. Hermione was enchanted by the cottage. “It’s really pretty, Mr. Lupin.”

“Thank you.” Remus didn’t get the chance to say anything else, as the door was flung open and Harry shot out.

“Harry.” Hermione threw herself at her friend, and hugged him hard.

"I'm so glad you're finally here. Come and meet everyone." Harry left Remus to follow at a more sedate pace, and dragged Hermione into the kitchen. "Mum, Hermione's here."

Nia looked up from the apple pies she was decorating, and wiped her hands. "Hello, Hermione, I'm so glad you're finally here. Harry has been excitable all day."

Harry blushed. "Mum!"

"Well, you have. Hermione, you already know Dudley and Luna. These three girls are my daughters, Aurilia, Georgiana and Scarlett-Rose."

All three girls waved at Hermione. Dudley and Luna exchanged quick greetings before returning to peeling potatoes in preparation for the meal that night.

"I'm sorry, Hermione but I need to keep an eye on things here in the kitchen. Harry will show you to your room." Nia apologized.

"Thank you, Mrs. Lupin." Hermione turned to Harry expectantly.

"Come with me." Harry led Hermione upstairs to a beautifully decorated bedroom.

"Harry, are you sure this room's for me?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, it's our guest room, and there's a bathroom through that door." Harry pointed out the door.

"It's really lovely." Hermione felt a little shy all of a sudden.

"Hermione, it's only a bedroom. Where's your trunk?" Harry noticed a lack of any luggage.

"It's in my pocket. Papa shrank it for me. I'll have to ask your father to resize it." Hermione explained.

Harry knew Hermione was a bit of a stickler for following rules, so he didn't offer to unshrink the trunk himself. "Okay. Do you want to see my room?"

Not giving Hermione a chance to answer, Harry grabbed her hand and led her further up the corridor, and into a surprisingly tidy bedroom.

"It's nice Harry." Hermione said politely.

Harry shut the door and dragged Hermione to sit on the bed. "I've got to talk to you."

"What about?" Hermione hoped that Harry had been able to put his worries about the diary aside for the holiday.

"My birth mother." Harry then proceeded to tell Hermione everything Remus had told him.

"I can't believe that you're really Potter's twin." Hermione sounded disgusted.

"I know, it's just too horrible. I suspected that there was a chance I might be, after talking with your Dad, but to hear it confirmed is something totally different." Harry was glad that he could talk things over with Hermione.

"So do I have to address you as 'your Grace' now?" Hermione teased Harry, who pulled a face at her.

"Absolutely not. I've told Dudley and Luna about who I really am, and they are refusing to call me anything but 'Your Grace' and it's driving me mad. I'm going to tell Fred and George when the Weasleys come to dinner tonight so no doubt I'll get some stick off them too. After everyone's reaction so far, I don't really want to tell too many people." Harry hated his newfound status, and had told his Dad that he sort of wished it hadn't happened.

"What about Neville and Draco?" Hermione was sorry she had teased Harry now.

"I'm going to tell them when we get back to school. I'm not sure about telling the rest of the Outcasts." Harry had worried over who he should tell and who he shouldn't.

"I'm sure that they wouldn't say anything but Seamus and Dean have been spending more time with Su Li and Padma than us, so don't tell them if you don't feel entirely comfortable yet. Can I tell Daphne though?" Hermione asked.

"Yes, you can. But you might find that Fred will beat you to it." Harry grinned. Fred had been enamored of Daphne ever since the Halloween ball, even with the age difference between the two of them.

Nia's voice drifted up to Harry. "Harry, can you and Hermione come down now, please? I really need some help in the kitchen."

Harry and Hermione both jumped up and ran downstairs into the dining room. Hermione stopped suddenly as she spotted Felidae standing with Remus.

"Felidae, why are you here?" Hermione then blushed at her own outspokenness.

Felidae just grinned. "Remus knew I was at a loose end, so he invited me for dinner. He didn't mention you would be here though."

Hermione then remembered Harry. "Harry, this is my fiancé, Felidae Venant. Felidae, this is my best friend, Harry Lupin."

Felidae bowed slightly. "Your Grace."

Harry blushed and held out his hand. "Mr. Venant, I'm just Harry."

Felidae grinned; he liked Harry already. "Harry, your father has told me lots about you."

Harry squirmed uncomfortably, and turned to his Dad. "Dad, Mum really needs my help."

Remus turned to his son. "Well, off you go then. Hermione can go with you."

Felidae watched as the two children left. "He's a nice boy. He'll make a wonderful husband for Hermione some day."

Remus choked on the scotch he was just taking a mouthful of. "I know he offered to marry her to get her out of an unwanted engagement, but that hardly makes them a sure thing."

Felidae laughed out loud. "I know, but I couldn't resist teasing you."

Remus prodded Felidae in the chest. "You'd better hope that young Hermione doesn't decide she wants you after all."

Felidae blanched and changed the subject.

Harry headed into the kitchen. "Mum, I feel a little queasy. I'll be back in a moment."

Harry left Hermione standing by his mother and disappeared towards the bathroom. Once there, he shut the door and leant up against it, his legs shaking a little.

Hermione's voice came through the door. "Harry, are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Hermione. I'll be out in a minute. I just thought I was going to be sick." Harry really did feel sick. Having just met Hermione's fiancé, he realized that he was going to have to forget about his feelings for her. No matter what she said, he knew that Hermione was never going to try and get out of marrying someone who looked like Venant did.

Taking a deep breath, Harry opened the door to find his Mum and Hermione standing there, and he quickly made an excuse for his pallor. "I didn't eat anything at breakfast; I think perhaps I should have."

“Come along, you can have an apple and some milk. Dinner won’t be for another few hours, and I don’t want you passing out.” Nia fussed over Harry all the way back to the kitchen.

Hermione was convinced that something else was wrong but as Nia kept her busy in the kitchen, and in her excitement at meeting Grimstock, she completely forgot to ask.

December 28th

Jamie sat down in his father’s study, wondering what Sirius could want to talk to him about.

Sirius came into the room and shut the door. “Jamie, would you like a butterbeer?”

Jamie accepted one and watched his father pour a firewhiskey for himself.

“Why did you want to see me, Sir?” Jamie asked, his nervousness revealing itself in his formal address of his father.

Sirius sat down. “It’s about the night your parents were attacked.”

Jamie was surprised; this was the last thing he had expected his Dad to talk to him about. “You mean when Voldemort killed James?”

“Yes.” Sirius knew that Jamie didn’t really regard James as his father, but looked to Sirius to fill that role instead.

“What about it?” Jamie was curious.

“Obviously you know what happened, but what you don’t know is that your twin survived.” Sirius was interrupted by Jamie’s exclamation.

“But Mum told me he had died.” Jamie was shocked to learn that his twin hadn’t been killed in the attack after all.

Sirius continued “She thought that he had. As you know, your mother spent some time in St. Mungo’s recovering after the attack. Because

your mother was sick, your brother was sent to be cared for by her sister.”

Sirius looked at Jamie, who had put down his butterbeer and was giving Sirius his full attention. “There was a mix-up at the hospital and your mother was mistakenly told that your brother had died. Unfortunately, no-one realized what had happened until last month, when we found out the truth by accident.”

Jamie was shocked at the hospital’s blunder. “Why isn’t he here now then?”

“Because your brother has only just been told about what happened a few days ago. We couldn’t just march in and take him. Up until now, he’s been living with your Aunt Petunia, and, in the same way you look to me as your father, your brother regards your aunt as his mother.” Sirius explained.

“But shouldn’t he come to live with us now that he knows?” Jamie was excited at the thought that his twin had survived.

Sirius shook his head. “No. How would you like to be taken away from your mother?”

Jamie was silent for a moment as he thought about what Sirius had told him.

A thought then struck him. “He is magical isn’t he? Aunt Petunia’s a muggle isn’t she?” Jamie struggled to try and remember what he had heard about his mother’s sister growing up.

“Yes, your Aunt is a muggle, but her husband and children are wizards and witches.” Sirius set Jamie’s mind at rest. No-one liked the idea of having a squib in the family.

“Which school does he attend, Durmstrang or Beauxbatons?” Jamie was convinced that he would have known if his brother was at Hogwarts.

“Actually, he attends Hogwarts.” Sirius knew that despite Jamie’s apparent excitement at having a twin, Jamie wasn’t going to be pleased when he found out who his brother really was.

“Hogwarts! But there’s no-one there who even looks like me.” Jamie pointed out.

“You aren’t identical twins. Your brother actually has black hair and green eyes, and...” Sirius was once more interrupted.

“But there’s no-one in my year who has green eyes, except for Seamus Finnegan but his hair isn’t black.” Jamie hoped it wasn’t Seamus, particularly as the two of them rarely spoke any more.

“It’s not Finnegan or anyone else out of Gryffindor. Your brother is actually a Ravenclaw.” Sirius tried to finish his speech so he could actually tell Jamie about Harry, but the boy interrupted him again.

“It can’t be the Lupins because they’re brothers, and Goldstein has blond hair. It must be Terry Boot then.” Jamie deduced wrongly.

Sirius shook his head. “Jamie, if you’ll let me get a word in, I’ll tell you. It’s not Boot; it’s Harry Lupin.”

“Lupin? But Dudley’s his twin isn’t he?” As both boys were in the same year, Jamie had just automatically assumed that Dudley was Harry’s twin.

“Dudley is actually Harry’s cousin, not his brother.” Sirius explained.

Jamie looked ill. “But I can’t stand Lupin. He’s a know-it-all and he’s best friends with a Slytherin. Are you sure he’s my brother?” Jamie looked hopeful that a mistake had been made.

“It’s true. Harry is your twin brother.” Sirius knew Jamie really wasn’t going to like what else he had to tell him.

“Just great. I could have coped with Boot but, no, I have to get that dork Lupin. Can it get any worse?” Jamie spat out.

Sirius let the blow fall on Jamie. "I'm sorry, but it can. Harry's not just your twin, he's also your older brother."

Jamie's face went from red to white as the implication of Sirius' statement sank in. "You mean that to say that he's the Potter heir?"

Sirius nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"It's not fair. The Potter estate was mine. He can't just come back from the grave and expect to get everything. I'm the one who spent hours learning all about running the estate; I'm the one who had to spend hours learning crappy etiquette, and I'm the one who had to go to those boring Ministry dinners. He doesn't deserve it. It's mine." Jamie ranted.

"I'm sorry, Jamie, but there's nothing you can do. By law everything goes to Harry." Sirius felt sorry for Jamie, but knew there was little that could be done to change matters. "James did allocate one million galleons to be left to any other children he might have, so that all goes to you."

"Big deal. The money in the Potter vaults has to be worth at least 40 million galleons, and all I'm going to get is a million galleons." Jamie was well aware that the Potter vaults held a substantial sum of money. No-one was sure how much as the Potter heir would only be able to access the main vaults on his seventeenth birthday. Lily would have discovered earlier that Jamie wasn't the Potter heir if, as Jamie's parent, she had tried to access the lower Potter vaults but, as Sirius was rich in his own right and she had had her own vault, she had never felt the need to do so.

Jamie thought for a moment. "If Harry gets it by law, then how come Draco won't get anything from his Dad?"

"Didn't you bother listening at all during your history lessons?" Sirius berated Jamie. He and Lily had arranged for Jamie to have private tutors to educate him in etiquette, history and business before he attended Hogwarts. "Lucius Malfoy is actually descended from French aristocracy rather than British. His family got dispensation from Louis XIV to deal with their inheritance as they saw fit after

Philippe Malfoy saved Louis' life. Even though the muggle French did away with their aristocracy some time ago, the French wizard aristocracy still exists."

"But why did you have to give everything to Draco?" Jamie pestered Sirius.

"I didn't expect to get married and have children. Anyway, only my money goes to Draco. You know full well that under English law, Orion will assume ownership of the Black title, land and houses on my death." Sirius patiently explained to Jamie.

"I know that, but do you still have to give all the money to Draco?" Jamie whined.

Sirius hid his anger at Jamie's crassness. "Jamie, is this just about the money?"

"No. Yes. No." Jamie couldn't decide. "I should have had the Potter titles and everything that went with them."

"Well you haven't. You're just going to have to face up to it." Sirius wished he'd let Lily do this now.

Jamie jumped up and swept his bottle off the table. "I hate Lupin. Why couldn't he have just died like he was supposed to?" Jamie by now was too far gone to care about what he was saying.

"James Sirius Potter, you will take that back immediately." Sirius took back his earlier wish that he should have let Lily tell Jamie; he knew Lily would have been heartbroken at Jamie's statement about his brother.

"No, I won't. I wish he was dead." With that Jamie got up and ran out of the study, nearly knocking Cho over on her way to the kitchen.

"Jamie, are you alright?" Cho was concerned at her boyfriend's red face.

“Are you stupid or what? Of course I’m not alright.” Jamie pushed Cho aside and ran towards his room, just wanting to get away and be on his own.

Cho was stunned, and turned round and headed for her own room.

Sirius ran up to Jamie’s room only to find Lily barring his way. “Let me speak to him, Siri.”

Sirius kissed Lily on her forehead and left her to deal with her son. “He’s all yours.”

Lily went into the room. “Jamie, honey.”

Jamie looked up. “It’s not fair, Mum. Just because he was born a few minutes before me, he’s going to get everything.”

“I know it’s unfair, but it’s not Harry’s fault.” Lily spoke gently to her son.

“You were married to James. Can’t you do anything about it?” Jamie asked desperately.

“You know I can’t. Harry’s offered to let you have use of Potter Hall in Kingslane.” Lily hoped Jamie would take the olive branch Harry had offered.

“I don’t want Lupin’s scraps, he can shove them up his...” Jamie was stopped by a mouthful of soap suds, something his mother hadn’t done to him since he was a small child.

“Jamie Potter, if you are going to act like a spoiled brat, then I’m going to treat you like one.” Lily was angry until Jamie looked up at her pitifully, tears welling in his eyes.

She immediately cancelled the spell.

“I’m sorry, Mum. It’s just that I expected to get the titles and everything. I just feel as if I’ve put all the effort into learning about the Potter estate and now Harry’s just come along and stolen everything

from me without so much as lifting a finger.” Jamie’s anger had abated, and now he just felt miserable.

“I know, honey. It’s just as hard for me.” Lily pointed out.

“Have you lost something as well then?” Jamie couldn’t think what.

“Yes, I lost all those years of Harry’s growing up. Even worse, he doesn’t want to see me.” It was now Lily’s turn to look miserable.

Jamie threw himself into his mother’s arms, his own woes forgotten for a moment in the wake of his mother’s distress. “He’s an idiot then. You’re the best mum in the world.”

Lily felt herself tear up at Jamie’s words. “Thanks, honey. It’s not Harry’s fault though. He thinks of my sister as his mother, not me.”

“But it’s not your fault that there was a mistake.” Jamie protested.

“I know, and it’s not Harry’s nor my sister’s, and if I was just to take him, then they would both suffer.” Lily had wanted to steal Harry away but knew she couldn’t; it would cause too much heartache and trouble for both families. “Your Uncle Remus has asked Harry to write to me, so I’m looking forward to his letters.”

“Well I’m not.” Jamie refocused on his own miseries once more. “I’m a nobody now.”

Lily couldn’t help herself, she laughed. “Hardly, as the son of a Duke, you are still Lord James Potter, and you have one title that Harry doesn’t have.”

“What’s that?” Jamie wondered what his mother was going on about.

“The Boy Who Lived.” Lily pointed out.

“I forgot about that for a moment.” Jamie said looking sheepish. His mum was right; he was the Boy Who Lived; he’d been the one to defeat Voldemort, not his stupid brother.

“I know; why don’t we go and watch a movie, just the two of us?” Lily suggested.

Jamie’s face lit at the thought of having some time alone with his mother. “That would be great.”

Suddenly he remembered Cho. “Oh, no.”

“What’s wrong?” Lily wondered what was up.

“I was really rude to Cho. I bumped into her just after Dad had told me about Harry.” Jamie looked a little shamefaced.

“Why don’t you go and apologize?” Lily suggested.

“Okay, and then I’ll be back.” Jamie jumped up and ran off to the Rose Room, where Cho was staying.

Knocking on the door, Jamie found Cho packing her own clothes. “Where are you going?”

“Home. Where do you think I’m going?” Cho ground out.

“Please don’t go.” Jamie pleaded.

“You don’t really expect me to stay after you so were rude to me, do you?” Cho’s face was still blotchy from where she had been crying.

“I’d just received some bad news. I’m sorry I took it out on you.” Jamie explained.

Cho halted in her packing. She wondered what bad news he had just received but good manners prevented her from asking. “I don’t know, Jamie. I think it might be better if I went home.”

“Please stay. I’m really sorry. I’ll make it up to you.” Jamie begged.

“How?” Cho relented a little, as she saw that Jamie appeared to be truly sorry.

“I’ll take you out for something to eat tonight.” Jamie offered, forgetting that his mother wanted to take him to the cinema.

Cho balked. “I still don’t know. You were really mean to me.”

“I know I shouldn’t have done it. Please give me another chance.” Jamie pleaded.

“Okay, but if it happens again, then we’re through.” Cho pushed Jamie out of her room. She still wasn’t sure if she had made the right choice.

Lily came up behind Jamie. “So, are you ready to go then?”

Jamie looked apologetically at his mum. “I’m sorry, I can’t go. Cho was going to go home, so I offered to take her to dinner to make up for being so rude.”

Lily was disappointed but hid it from Jamie. “That’s okay. Why don’t you take her to the Rainforest Café? I’ll apparate you both, and arrange to pick you up later when I pay for the meal.”

Jamie’s face lit up. “That’d be great; thanks Mum.”

“Go get ready.” Lily was just glad that he seemed to have gotten over his disappointment about the Potter estate.

Jamie walked off smiling. However, once he was out of sight of his mother, the smile fell off his face. He hated that the Potter estate was going to go to Lupin. However, he was sensible enough to realize that he would probably have to take Harry’s offer of Potter Hall. He would worry about Lupin later though. He didn’t want to upset Cho any more than he already had.

30th December 1992

The Alliance had got together to discuss Lily’s letter to Dumbledore. What had started as a group of six had, since Christmas Day, blossomed into ten. Narcissa had been supposed to be staying with her sister Andy Weasley for Christmas but Lily had vetoed the idea

and invited the Weasleys to dinner at Black Manor instead. Lily and Narcissa had discussed asking Andy and Arthur to join the Alliance, and, after listening to Lily's tale, both had accepted. Arthur had said that two of their children, Nym, being a new recruit in the Auror Division, and Bill, being an expert in ward breaking, would probably be good candidates to join the Alliance. After discussing it amongst the founder members, the Alliance had admitted Bill and Nym, who had, after being told of Dumbledore's alleged treachery, both agreed to join.

Lily showed the Alliance a copy of the letter she had written to Dumbledore together with his response. She had decided to try to be as nice as she could in the letter; she knew it might be her only chance of finding out why Dumbledore had lied to her.

"Dear Albus,

There is no easy way to say this but I have just discovered that you deliberately separated my children after Voldemort attacked us. I cannot believe that you would be so cruel as to tell me Harry had died unless you had good reason. I would like to meet with you to discuss what happened.

Lily Black"

"Dear Lily

This letter is a portkey. It will bring you here to Hogwarts at any time on the day you read it. The activation phrase is 'cherry pop.' If you do not wish to come, then the letter will deactivate at midnight.

Albus Dumbledore"

Lily looked at Sirius. "I'm going to go."

"Are you mad? It could be a trap." Sirius wasn't happy at Lily risking her life confronting Dumbledore.

"He knows that I will have told someone where I'm going. He isn't going to kill me. I want to know why he did it." Lily told Sirius.

Arthur spoke up. "I agree with Lily. She should be safe. I think she needs to go, Sirius."

"No, I don't want her to go." Sirius still didn't want to expose Lily to Dumbledore's machinations.

Felidae knew Sirius wouldn't want his opinion, but he gave it anyway. "I agree with Lily and Arthur. Dumbledore is a nasty piece of work, but there is no way he will jeopardize his position by attacking the mother of the Boy Who Lived."

Sirius relented. "Fine, but I want Lily to take precautions. She can wear the Black family ring. It will prevent Dumbledore from tampering with her mind."

Lily was surprised that Sirius had revealed one of his family ring's capabilities. "Thank you, honey.."

Felidae watched closely as a ring appeared in Sirius' hand only for it to disappear once it was placed on Lily's finger. No-one, except for Sirius, not even Lily, who could see the ring on her finger, could take the ring off now.

"I think it's best if I go now." Lily picked up the letter.

"We'll all be waiting here for you." Remus promised.

Lily spoke the portkey activation words and vanished from sight. She stumbled slightly as she landed, finding herself in a room she hadn't stepped in since she last left Hogwarts.

"Lily, I'm glad you decided to come." Albus indicated that Lily should sit down. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"No thank you." Lily sat down. "I'm only here to find out why you stole my son from me."

Albus sighed. "As you know, there is a prophecy stating that Jamie is destined to defeat Voldemort. What I didn't tell you is that there was a second prophecy about Harry."

"A second prophecy?" Lily was surprised. "Why didn't you tell us about it when James and I first went into hiding?"

"I didn't discover it until just after Voldemort was vanquished by Jamie." Dumbledore explained.

"Do I get to hear this prophecy?" Lily thought Dumbledore was just making excuses.

Dumbledore indicated his pensieve. "I have the memory of the actual prophecy being made."

Lily looked suspiciously at Dumbledore. "We will both go in together then?"

"Of course." Dumbledore set the pensieve so it was ready for viewing, and together the pair touched the liquid.

Lily found herself standing in the divination room in Hogwarts. She watched as Sybil Trelawney waffled onto Dumbledore about how grateful she was to have been given the divination position when Sybil suddenly stiffened, and began speaking in a hoarse voice.

'Separate the twin sons of the flower mother

She must deny her first born her love

For his brother to be victorious

Over the Dark Lord'

Lily pulled out of the pensieve in shock, and Dumbledore quickly followed. "I'm sorry Lily. I knew you would never voluntarily give up Harry, so I thought it best to tell you that he had died. I told your sister that you didn't want him any more. I made sure that she wouldn't try and contact you by use of a persuasion charm on her."

"But it wasn't your decision to make." Lily protested.

"I know that my actions might seem a little harsh to you, but it was for the greater good." Dumbledore still believed he had done the right thing.

"How can taking my son away from me be for the greater good?" Lily was still reeling at the prophecy.

"Voldemort isn't gone. We need Jamie to defeat him. If taking Harry away from you achieves that aim, then I believe that what I did was right." Dumbledore defended himself.

"I've got to go. I need time to think this over." Lily just wanted to get away from Dumbledore and get home to Sirius.

"The same letter will take you home." Dumbledore indicated the paper that Lily still held clutched tightly in her hand.

Lily stood up, only to be stopped by Dumbledore's hand on her shoulder. "Please don't judge me badly by what I did. I only did what I thought was best at the time."

Lily pulled out of Dumbledore's grasp and portkeyed home.

The next chapter is in the works. Harry and Jamie finally confront each other; Hermione makes a discovery; Harry has an accident; Narcissa gets married and Tom strikes again.

One of my reviewers, Mlui, pointed out that Dumbledore would be able to see that Flitwick is really Leo Flamel by use of the map. There is a simple answer to this - Leo was already aware of the map and took the simple precaution of changing his name. How he knows about the map won't come out until year 4 or 5 (not decided which yet). Thanks Mlui for pointing that out.

I should also point out that Leo is actually Felidae's contact in Hogwarts, as I'm not entirely sure I made this clear enough in the story.

I hope to be able to post again this weekend, but this month is turning out to be a lot busier than I expected. Thanks for everyone's continued support.

Chapter 25: Reunions

Harry and Jamie finally talk; Harry has an accident; Sirius gets a shock; Narcissa gets married; Hermione makes a discovery; and Tom strikes again.

The Alliance all stood up as Lily appeared, white-faced and shaking.

Sirius ran round the table to his wife. "Lily, what happened?"

Lily just shook her head, unable to speak.

Sirius turned to Arthur. "Arthur, get her a brandy."

Arthur poured the brandy and passed the glass to Lily, who swiftly drank its contents before shuddering.

Lily took a deep breath and turned to the group; the brandy had had a calming effect on her. "Dumbledore admitted everything; he believes he had a good reason to do it."

Felidae spoke softly to the still pale woman. "What reason, Lily?"

"There's a second prophecy. He showed me it being made. Apparently Harry had to be deprived of my love in order for his brother to be able to kill You-Know-Who." Lily then recited the entire prophecy for the Alliance.

"So, Jamie is definitely the Boy Who Lived then?" Andy half asked, half stated.

"It would appear so." Felidae answered.

Lily looked at Sirius. "We need to tell them about Harry."

"What about Harry?" Remus wondered what Lily knew about his son that he didn't.

"He's a parselmouth." Lily sat back and waited for the reaction.

“Are you sure?” Remus was astounded. He’d never heard Harry speak in snake language.

“I’m sure. I heard him talking to a snake when I visited Hogwarts.” Sirius told everyone.

“Why was he talking to a snake in Hogwarts?” Arthur asked.

“One had found its way into the infirmary, and he was telling it to go. Harry was just as surprised as I was to discover his ability.” Sirius avoided mentioning Berus.

“Where do you think he got the ability?” Narcissa was as surprised as everyone else at the news that her friend’s son was a parselmouth.

“You-Know-Who.” Felidae conjectured. “I imagine there was must have been some kind of backlash of energy when he was destroyed. I think some of it must have hit Jamie creating his curse scar and that some of it must have also hit Harry imbuing him with You-Know-Who’s ability to speak to snakes.”

Sirius agreed with Felidae for once. “You might be right. It certainly makes sense, especially with both boys being so closed to You-Know-Who when it happened.”

“Are you going to tell Jamie about Harry’s ability?” Arthur wanted to know.

Lily shook her head. “The fewer people that know, the better.”

“And what about the prophecy, are you going to tell the boys about that?” Bill Weasley, who up until now had been listening quietly, voiced the question most of the people there wanted to know.

Lily shook her head. “Not yet, they’re still too young to be burdened with this problem just yet.”

Sirius disagreed. “I think we should tell them. It’s Dumbledore’s fault that they were split up. Perhaps it would help to reconcile the two of them.”

"You mean the old adage, 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'?" Felidae responded.

Sirius nodded. "Exactly. I think it would help."

"I'm not telling Harry. He's far too young, as Lily said. I want my son to have a childhood. I don't want him to reconcile with his brother just because they share a mutual hatred of someone." Remus wasn't happy with Sirius' idea.

"I want to tell Jamie." Sirius persisted, and looked to Lily for support.

"I don't know, Sirius." Lily wavered slightly.

"I won't have my son involved in Dumbledore's machinations; this way at least, he'll be prepared for anything Dumbledore throws at him." Sirius pointed out.

Felidae hated to say it, but he realized that Sirius was right. "Lily, I have to agree with Sirius on this point. The more prepared the boys are the better chance they'll stand against Dumbledore if he tries something."

Narcissa, who had been silent until now, finally spoke up. "If it was Draco, I would want him to know. He'd be angry if I kept something this important from him."

Remus still shook his head. "I still don't want to tell Harry."

Lily looked at Remus. "I've changed my mind. I'm going to tell Jamie."

"And I still don't want Harry to know." Remus was adamant.

"Then I'll make sure Jamie doesn't tell him." Lily promised.

The Alliance then spent some time dissecting both prophecies, the one that had been made before the boys had been born, and the subsequent one shown to Lily by Dumbledore. Everyone agreed that it appeared that Jamie was definitely the Boy Who Lived; the only

dissenter was Remus who had a feeling that it still might be Harry, particularly after the news about his snake speaking ability.

January 2nd 1993

Harry found an empty carriage on the Hogwarts Express. He could have just made the journey from Darcy Cottage but wanted to ride the train instead. Luna and Dudley hadn't wanted to make the journey, so Grimstock was going to take the two children up to the school when the train got in.

A sound at the door brought Harry out of his reverie. Draco and Neville were both standing there.

"I wondered where you two had gotten to." Harry was pleased to see his two friends. "Sit down. I've got some news for you."

Intrigued, the two boys hurried to store their trunks, and sat down, eager to hear Harry's news. Before Harry had a chance to say anything, however, someone else entered the carriage.

"Jamie, what can I do for you?" Harry had hoped to tell the two boys about his twin in his own time, but it now looked as if they were about to find out in a manner slightly different than the one Harry had envisaged.

Draco and Neville looked at each other. Neville mouthed the word "Jamie?" at Draco who just shook his head. He didn't know why Harry was suddenly addressing his cousin as 'Jamie', and not 'Potter'.

"I think it best if we have a little privacy." Jamie looked pointedly at Draco and Neville.

"They're not going anywhere." Harry wasn't going to ask his friends to leave without good reason.

Jamie shrugged, and entered the carriage, shutting the door behind him, before locking it. "Whatever."

Harry watched warily as Jamie sat down opposite him and placed his wand on the seat. "As I said, Jamie, what can I do for you?"

"I know we haven't been the best of friends." Jamie started, only for Harry to snort loudly. "Okay then, we hated each other. But that was before I found out who you were."

Harry immediately felt suspicious of Jamie's motives. He knew Jamie didn't like him and he was wondering why he was bothering to make the effort at all. "And?"

"Mum said that you won't see her. I want to know why." Jamie demanded.

"Why would Harry want to see Aunt Lily?" Draco was confused.

"Because she's his real mother." Jamie enjoyed seeing the shocked expression on both Draco's and Neville's faces.

"That's what I was going to tell you before he came in here." Harry told his two friends.

Jamie asked his question again. "So, why not?"

"Not that it's any of your business but I'm just not ready yet. Lily knows I'll be in touch when I am." Harry explained. "Is that all you wanted?"

"No. Mum also said that you offered me the use of Potter Hall. Is that true?" Jamie asked.

Draco and Neville stayed silent, listening to the interaction between the two boys.

"Yes. I've asked Dad to speak to the goblins at Gringotts. They're going to draw up a paper saying that you and your children will be allowed to live there for as long as you want to." Harry wasn't surprised that Jamie hadn't believed that Harry would freely offered him something.

“Thank you.” Jamie smiled.

Neville caught on quicker than Draco. “So Harry’s the Potter heir then?”

Harry nodded. “I found out at Christmas. Apparently Jamie’s my younger twin.”

Both Draco and Neville knew that also meant that Harry had to be the Duke of Harbridge. Draco got to the mark first. “So you’re also the new Duke then as well aren’t you?”

“Of course he is.” Jamie snapped out.

Jamie seemed to be waging a battle with himself as several emotions flitted across his face in quick succession. Getting up he held out his hand and looked directly at Harry, ignoring Draco and Neville. “Hi, I’m Jamie Potter and I’m pleased to meet you.”

Harry looked guardedly at Jamie’s hand, but shook it anyway. “Harry Lupin. I don’t mean to be rude after your sudden thaw, but why are you honestly doing this?”

Jamie sat back down. “Mum asked if I’d at least try to be civil to you. She pointed out that we would probably have been best friends if the mix-up hadn’t happened.”

Both boys ignored Draco’s “yeah right”.

“She’s probably right, but I hope she doesn’t expect us to get along straight away after everything that has happened.” Harry looked at his brother expectantly.

“She doesn’t, but she said that she doesn’t want to hear about my fighting with you either.” Jamie explained.

“So she already knows that we don’t get along then?” Harry asked.

“Yes, she does. I’ve heard Jamie whinging about you plenty of times to Aunt Lily, especially about how crap he thinks you are at quidditch.” Draco interjected.

Jamie pulled a face at his cousin. “Will you please shut up? I’m trying to talk to Harry.”

Harry looked at Draco and Neville. “Guys, would you give me and Jamie a minute alone?”

Neville immediately stood up, unlocked the door and pulled a reluctant Draco out of the carriage with him.

Jamie watched them go, before turning his attention back to Harry. “Thanks. I think we need to start from the beginning as we don’t really know each other very well. How about I tell you something about me, and you can do the same?”

Harry decided to go along with his twin’s suggestion. “Okay, as it’s your idea, you can go first.”

“You probably already know a lot about me, don’t you?” Jamie asked, deflecting Harry’s request.

“Yes, it’s not as if you exactly keep a low profile.” Harry remarked in a sardonic tone. He realized that he would have to start if he wanted the conversation to go anywhere. “I’ll go first then. My full name is Harry Remus Lupin-Potter, and I live with my parents, Remus and Nia, in Hogsmeade with my brother, Dudley, and my three sisters, Aurilia, Georgiana and Scarlett-Rose.”

“I don’t know how you manage with three sisters. I get along well enough with Anna but Cassie is a bit of a nuisance. You actually remind me a little of my brother Orion.” Jamie interrupted.

“Oh, that’s nice.” As Harry didn’t know Orion, he wasn’t really convinced that it was a compliment, and continued with his recital. “Anyway, I found out that I could do magic when I was four, and I got my first training wand when I was six.”

“Six? I had my first real wand by then.” Jamie scoffed, and held up his wand for Harry to see. “This is my second wand; I accidentally broke my first one when I fell out of a tree.”

Harry dutifully looked at the wand. “What’s it made of?”

“Holly. It’s ten inches long and has a dragon’s heartstring inside.” Jamie passed his wand over to Harry so his brother could look closer at it. “What’s your wand made of?”

Harry swapped wands but before he could answer the question, Jamie exclaimed out loud. “Your wand’s made of holly as well. Has it got a dragon’s heartstring inside too?”

Harry shook his head. “No, but you’re right that it’s made of holly. My wand contains a phoenix feather and is eleven inches long.”

Jamie passed Harry his wand back. “I’m sure that’s the wand I tried before I found this one.”

Jamie looked round the carriage. “Harry, where’s the rest of your friends?”

“Luna and Dudley didn’t want to make the long train journey, and Hermione is flooing directly in from her home. She went home two days ago; she spent a few days at my house after Christmas.” Harry explained.

Jamie asked what had been bugging him for a long time. “Why do you spend so much time with Snivellus’ daughter? She’s not ever going to be your girlfriend, so why do you bother?”

“Why do you spend so much time with that first year girl, Miranda?” Harry countered.

“She’s my friend.” Jamie pointed out.

“There’s your answer then. Hermione’s my best friend.” Harry told his brother, and asked Jamie a question about his friend. “Do you miss Prewett?”

“Sometimes I do. Colin and Miranda have been great though, particularly as I don’t get on with anyone else in my year, except for Lavender and Parvati.” Jamie explained.

Knowing exactly why Jamie didn’t get on with anyone else, Harry changed the subject, and asked about Jamie’s parents. “I know Sirius is a healer, but does Lily work?”

Jamie nodded. “She works from home. She’s a charms designer for Charisma Global.”

Harry was impressed. Charisma Global was a worldwide wizarding company which specialized in integrating personalized charms into clothing or objects. “She must be really clever then.”

Jamie nodded proudly. “She is. She works from home on the more important pieces that come in for the company. Does Aunt Petunia work?”

Harry nodded his head. “She’s a freelance organizer for a muggle company, Cuisine & More. She’s in charge of the catering section for one-off parties, such as meals for hunting parties and women’s showers.”

“Is she a good cook then?” Jamie loved his food and thought his own mother was a fabulous cook.

“Yes, she does all the cooking for the parties herself usually, if they’re not too big.” Harry explained. “She got the position after hosting a party for one of her friends. The owner of Cuisine & More liked what she did, so she got the job. Luckily we had a nanny to take care of us whenever she had to do jobs that took her away from the house. She didn’t really start doing lots of jobs though until Scarlett was about two.”

“We’ve never had a nanny. The house elves always took care of us if Mum was really busy and Aunt Narcy couldn’t do it.” Jamie told his brother.

“Who’s Aunt Narcy?” Harry asked.

“Sorry. Narcissa Black, Draco’s mother.” Jamie pulled a face when he mentioned Draco.

“I take it you don’t really like Draco.” Harry hadn’t missed Jamie’s expression.

“He’s okay. He gets on better with Cassie and Orion than he does with me or Anna. They both think he is wonderful.” Jamie really loathed Draco but thought it best not to mention this to Harry, particularly as Draco was probably standing outside.

Both boys then fell silent, neither of them knowing what else to say. Jamie got up. “I’ve got to get back to my carriage. I left Cho with Colin and Miranda. You can come if you want to.”

Harry shook his head. “Thanks, but I think I’ll stay here with my friends.”

Jamie opened the door. “Okay. I’ll see you around, Harry.”

Harry watched as Jamie left the carriage. He didn’t know why but he felt as if he still couldn’t really trust Jamie, despite their mini accord.

Draco and Neville passed Jamie as the boy headed towards his own carriage. However, instead of going back to sit with his friends, Jamie walked up to the end of the corridor and sat down in an empty carriage. He hadn’t really wanted to talk to Harry but Lily had asked that he at least make an attempt to get to know his brother.

Lily had then told Jamie about both prophecies. Jamie was a little scared at the thought that You-Know-Who wasn’t actually gone, and that one day he would have to face him. Jamie had been angry at what he saw as being Dumbledore’s failure to protect the Potter family properly; if Dumbledore had done more, then he, Jamie, would never have had to face Voldemort at all.

Jamie had become even angrier when Lily had told him about Dumbledore separating the twins. Jamie had wanted to hit something,

and it had taken Lily some time to calm him down. Jamie knew that he really didn't particularly like Harry, but Jamie wondered what things would have been like with him and Harry if Dumbledore hadn't stolen his brother. He also wondered what else Dumbledore might have been responsible for.

In Harry's carriage Draco and Neville were being filled in more fully on what Harry had discovered over the Christmas holiday.

"Wow, Harry. That's amazing. You do know that you're really rich now, don't you?" Draco pointed out the obvious.

"Yes, and I'm not that bothered about the money. Anyway, it's not like you and Neville are exactly paupers." Harry countered.

Neville was well off, but he knew that the Longbottoms weren't in the same league as the Blacks and the Potters. "That's true, but you're almost royalty as well."

"It doesn't change who I am though." Harry hated the whole wizarding nobility baggage that came with the Potter name.

"Sorry, Harry. You're right. Let's talk about something else." Draco knew that their prodding was making Harry uncomfortable.

Neville changed the subject by telling them about the letter he had had from his sister, Seville, who had been visiting his aunt in America.

After that, the three boys fell into a general discussion about life in general, but Harry's news lingered in the back of all three boys' minds.

February 3rd 1993

Harry woke up to find himself in a private room in St. Mungo's. The last thing he remembered, he'd just grabbed the snitch, and the ground was coming up to meet him at an alarming rate.

A knock at the door alerted Harry to the fact that someone was about to come in.

“Sirius!” Harry exclaimed, happy to see a familiar face.

“Hi Harry. How are you feeling?” Sirius asked.

“Sore. What happened?” From the way his ribs and chest felt, Harry had a fairly good idea of what he had done.

“You broke several ribs when you fell. That idiot Lockhart tried to heal you, but vanished your bones instead, causing your chest cavity to collapse. Poppy was run off her feet and the trainees weren’t able to deal with the problem, so you were brought here instead.” Sirius explained.

“Daddy, who are you talking to?” A little girl with red hair came into Harry’s room.

“This is Harry, Cassie.” Sirius turned from his daughter to Harry. “Harry, this is my youngest daughter, Cassie.”

“Hello, Harry.” Cassie smiled shyly.

Two more children appeared before Harry could say anything.

“These are also my children; Orion and Anna.” Sirius informed Harry.

“Hi everyone.” Harry suddenly felt a little shy surrounded by Sirius and his children.

“Hi Harry. Dad said you hurt yourself playing quidditch. I want to learn to play. Dad won’t let me at the moment in case I hurt myself. But I do love to watch it. Can I see you play sometime?” Orion’s words tumbled out of his mouth at speed; he was almost bouncing in excitement.

“Your Dad is right. Quidditch can be quite dangerous; that’s why I’m here in hospital. If your Dad says it is okay and the school says yes, then of course you can come and watch me.” Harry told the excited boy.

“And me too?” Cassie looked hopeful.

"You too." Harry confirmed. "Anna, would you like to come and watch me play?"

Anna shook her head. "No, thank you."

The group chatted for a while until Sirius said that they had to let Harry get some rest. Harry was glad to meet his half-siblings but he had the feeling that Anna didn't really like him. This was confirmed when the group went to leave; Anna remaining behind to speak to Harry.

"I know who you are. You stole everything from my brother. I hate you. You'll never be my brother." The girl hissed at him, before she stomped off.

Anna's words had carried outside the room and Sirius was waiting for her. "I think it's time we all went to my office."

The group traipsed off to Sirius' office where he cast privacy spells before turning to speak to Anna. "Adrianna Black, you will remain silent while I am talking to Cassie and Orion or you will be grounded for a month."

Anna recognized how angry Sirius was, and slumped into a chair dejectedly. This was all Harry's fault!

Orion turned to his Dad. "What did Anna mean when she told Harry he'll never be her brother, and about stealing everything, Dad?"

"You weren't supposed to know about Harry yet, but as your sister quite rudely let the cat of the bag, I may as well tell you. Harry is actually Jamie's twin brother." Sirius told the children.

"Where's he been? Why doesn't he live with us?" Orion couldn't believe that his Mum wouldn't want Harry.

"Harry's being living with your aunt; she's his mother." Sirius was interrupted by Cassie.

“Are you his Daddy?”

“No, sweetheart. Harry’s daddy is Uncle Remus, and his mummy is Aunt Petunia. They adopted Harry when he was a baby.” Sirius and Lily had explained to the children who Remus and Petunia were after finding out about Harry, but not much more than that, and Sirius knew that Cassie wouldn’t really understand anyway.

“Why, Daddy?” Cassie asked.

“Because Mum thought he was horrible and got rid of him, of course, stupid.” Anna bit out.

Sirius turned on his daughter. “Adrianna, you are grounded for a month. One more word from you and you can forget about going to Narcy’s wedding on Saturday. Do I make myself clear?”

Anna tried to stop the tears, and her voice shook. “Sorry, Daddy.”

Sirius turned back to his other two children to finish his explanation. “You both know about Jamie and the bad man, don’t you?”

Both children nodded their heads. Cassie was still too young to understand about Voldemort, so Lily and Sirius had just called him ‘the bad man’.

“When the bad man attacked Jamie and Mummy, he also attacked Harry. When Harry was brought here to the hospital, there was a mix-up and Mummy was told that Harry had died. Harry hadn’t though and he was sent to live with Aunt Petunia, who thought that Mummy couldn’t look after Harry any more. Aunt Petunia adopted Harry when she married your Uncle Remus.” Sirius hoped the children would understand.

“Is Harry my new brother then, Daddy?” Cassie asked, looking a little upset.

“Yes, is he, sweetheart.” Sirius was horrified to see Cassie burst into floods of tears at his statement. “What’s the matter, sweetie?”

“He’ll be mean to me.” She sobbed.

“No, he won’t.” Sirius tried to tell her.

“But he’s Jamie’s brother, and Jamie is always mean to me.” Cassie sobbed even harder.

Sirius picked Cassie up and put her on his lap. “Harry isn’t Jamie, sweetheart. In fact, why don’t we go and see Harry again. You’ll see that he isn’t mean at all.”

Cassie nervously nodded her assent and her sobs started to recede.

Sirius turned to the other children. “Do you two want to come with me?”

Orion jumped up immediately but Anna shook her head in a sullen fashion.

Sirius turned to Orion. “Please watch Cassie; I’m going to floo home with Anna and I’ll be straight back.”

Anna was taken home and, after quickly briefing Lily on what had happened, Sirius flooed back to his office.

Picking Cassie up, Sirius marched out of his office, closely followed by Orion.

Harry looked up as his door opened and Sirius reappeared with two of his three children.

Cassie had her head buried in Sirius’ shoulder. “Cassie, sweetie, look, Harry’s pleased to see you.”

Cassie reluctantly lifted her tearstained face up to see Harry smiling at her.

“Cassie, are you okay?” Harry asked, sounded concerned. “Did I do something wrong?”

Cassie shook her head, but still didn't speak. Sirius gently unwrapped her from him and popped her on the bed next to Harry, who was gingerly reaching across to his bedside cabinet. Cassie watched as Harry opened his hand.

"You said you liked quidditch, didn't you, Cassie?" Harry continued without giving the little girl a chance to answer. "Would you like my snitch?"

Cassie looked at the snitch before hesitantly reaching out to take it from Harry. Grasping it tightly, she suddenly launched herself at Harry, who cringed in pain. Cassie immediately pulled back.

"It's okay, Cassie. I'm just a little sore from playing quidditch. You can stay next to me if you want to." Harry reassured the frightened looking girl.

"Thanks, Harry." Cassie looked pleased with her gift. "Look at what Harry gave me, Daddy"

"I know. Aren't you lucky?" Sirius was pleased with how Harry had treated his daughter.

Harry grinned at his sister. "I grabbed that as I fell off my broom playing Slytherin. I think we won."

Harry then spotted Orion's hungry look at the snitch his sister was holding. "The next snitch I catch is for you, okay Orion?"

Orion's face lit up. "Great. Thanks, Harry."

At that moment a small house elf popped in. "Healer Black. Emergency on the third floor."

Sirius turned to the children. "Harry, can Orion and Cassie stay with you until I get back?"

"Of course. I'll look after them."

Sirius finally returned to Harry's room the next day; he had gotten caught up in his work and had only had time to send a message to Lily that the children were okay and would be back later. Sirius hadn't expected later to be the next day.

On entering Harry's room, he found all three children sitting on Harry's bed, about to share a large breakfast.

Harry looked up. "I asked for extra food. Do you want some, Sirius?"

Sirius was starving. Nodding, he grabbed a spare plate and helped himself to breakfast. The children were still eating and talking happily amongst themselves when Sirius slipped out of the room. He came back a few minutes later armed with a camera. All three children obliged him and smiled for the camera.

"Is that for Lily?" Harry asked.

"Why do you call Mummy, Lily?" Cassie was confused. She now knew her mother was really Harry's mother as well.

"Because I don't really know your Mummy very well. Remember what I told you yesterday about having a different mummy since I was a baby?" Harry patiently asked his sister.

"Oh yes but you can still call my Mummy 'Mummy' as well, if you want to." Cassie smiled winningly at Harry, who couldn't resist the little girl.

"Okay then. Sirius, are those pictures for Mummy?" Harry grinned at Sirius.

"Yes, Harry they are. Do you want copies for yourself?" Sirius knew that Lily would kick out of the memory, so he decided to give the photos, together with a mini-pensieve of the memory to Lily as a late birthday present.

"Yes, please." Harry already felt close to Orion and Cassie, even though he'd only just met them. He knew that Nia and Remus would love them too. He wasn't so sure about Anna though. It appeared as

if she had already made up her mind about him without even getting to know him.

Sirius turned to his children. "Orion, Cassie, could you both please wait outside while I talk to Harry?"

The children nodded, and hugged Harry before leaving the room.

"Harry, I know you said that you don't want to see Lily yet, but I have a favor to ask. My cousin, Narcissa, is getting married this weekend and she's asked if you would like to attend. I was wondering if you would consider coming." Sirius looked hopefully at Harry.

"But I won't know anyone." Harry pointed out.

"You'll know me, the children and Draco." Sirius hadn't told Lily he was planning to do this.

Harry thought for a moment. After meeting his new brother and sisters, he wondered if maybe it was time to meet Lily as well. "Can I think about it?"

Sirius nodded. "Of course, I'll be back this afternoon. Is that enough time?"

"I'll let you know by then." Harry promised. Sirius then disappeared out of the room.

Later that day Sirius entered Harry's room tentatively. He hoped that the boy had rethought his decision about seeing Lily.

"Hi Harry. How are you feeling?" Sirius didn't want it to seem as if the only reason he had to come visit Harry was to get his answer.

"I'm feeling much better." Harry felt a little queasy but he knew that had more to do with his nerves than his injury.

"Good. Have you thought any more about what I asked?" Sirius tried to phrase the question without appearing to put pressure on Harry.

"Yes, I have. To be honest, it seems silly that I've met everyone in your family except for Lily." Harry started.

"Does that mean you'll come to the wedding then?" Sirius interrupted.

Harry nodded his head. "Is it possible to meet with Lily before the wedding? I don't want to meet her for the first time in front of everyone."

Sirius let out the breath he didn't realize he had been holding. "I'll arrange for you to be released into my care tomorrow. You can meet Lily tomorrow evening."

"Will anyone else be there?" Harry hoped Anna wouldn't be around.

"No. I'll arrange for the children to stay with Narcissa." Sirius smiled happily at the bedridden child. "Thanks, Harry. You have no idea how much this will mean to Lily."

Harry watched as Sirius headed out of the room. He hoped that he had made the right choice.

The next evening

Lily thought she was going to throw up. "Sirius, what if he hates me?"

"He's not going to hate you." Sirius didn't really know what else to say, and gently pushed Lily towards Harry's door.

Lifting a shaky hand, Lily knocked on the door and entered at Harry's nervous "come in".

Lily pushed open the door to see Harry sitting up in bed, looking pensive. "Hello Harry."

"Hello." Harry wasn't really sure what to call his birth mother.

Lily approached the bed. "I'm glad that you've finally agreed to see me."

"It seemed silly that I'd already met everyone except for you." Harry explained.

"Before I say anything else to you, I've got a confession to make." Lily sat down in the chair at the side of the bed.

Harry looked curiously at his mother. "Okay then."

"Harry, we've actually already met." Lily hoped that Harry wouldn't hate her when she told him.

"I know that; you didn't give me up until I was nearly two." Harry didn't catch on to Lily's meaning.

Lily shook her head. "We met last year."

Harry was stunned. "But when? I would have remembered meeting you."

"Do you remember Berus?" Lily asked.

Harry nodded his head, and watched in amazement as his mother stood up and transformed. In her place lay the black viper Sirius had brought into the school hospital ward. Lily then resumed her original appearance.

"Why didn't you reveal who you were back then?" Harry asked.

"I couldn't. I'm sorry but I can't tell you why." Lily wondered whether Harry would react like Jamie and throw a tantrum.

Harry felt betrayed and spoke quietly but firmly. "I want to go back to the hospital. Sirius knew who you were when he brought you into Hogwarts to see me, yet he was still begging me yesterday to see you even though he knew that you'd already met me."

"Harry, please let me explain." Lily begged.

Harry gave silent permission for Lily to continue with a brief nod of his head.

"I didn't know that Sirius was going to go to the hospital wing. I'd planned to slip off his neck and disappear into the Headmaster's office." Lily now looked embarrassed; she'd almost blown the entire operation by what she was about to admit to her son. "Unfortunately I fell asleep around Sirius' neck and only awoke when we were in the hospital ward. I swear that Sirius didn't plan on my meeting with you. If you remember, he tried to get me to leave with him."

Harry looked Lily directly in the eye for the first time. "I believe you."

Lily let out a sigh of relief. "Thank you, Harry. I really didn't intend to stay with you, but it was too much of a temptation."

Harry was grateful for Lily's honesty. "It's okay." A thought then occurred to him. "Why did you want to get into the Headmaster's office?"

"I can't tell you. I shouldn't have really told you about me being in the school and being Berus, but I wanted to be honest with you." Lily explained.

Harry sat quietly for a moment before snapping his fingers together. "I know why you were at Hogwarts. You took Fawkes didn't you?"

Lily was surprised at Harry's intelligence; even Sirius hadn't worked it out, and he'd known she'd been in Hogwarts at the time. "How did you work that out?"

"I heard Dumbledore complaining to Madam Pomfrey when I was in the hospital about Fawkes being gone, and that he might have problems obtaining phoenix tears for some of her potions. It was on the same day I met Berus, I mean you." Harry admitted.

Harry then realized something else. "You had inside help, didn't you? There was no way you could have gotten into the Headmaster's office otherwise, as you couldn't speak the password if you were a snake. How did you do it?"

Lily knew that Harry had already guessed too much. "Harry, have you ever heard of Legilimency?"

Harry nodded his head. "Yes, Professor Snape explained it to me."

Lily was curious. "Why would Severus explain that to you?"

"I've been having nightmares, and he was trying to help me." Harry avoided any mention of the diary. "He tried using Legilimency on me but had trouble when he tried to get into my mind."

"Are you still getting nightmares now?" Lily sounded concerned.

Harry shook his head. "They only get really bad when I'm stressed or tired. They are usually better when I'm at Hogwarts."

"Have you had one since your accident?" Lily couldn't help but be worried.

Harry shook his head. "No, I've been sleeping really well."

"Good. Getting back to the Legilimency though; do you mind if Sirius tests your barriers?" Lily was relieved at Harry's statement that even Severus had had problems but she still wanted to make sure. "It's important that Dumbledore doesn't find out about who took Fawkes."

"You think that Dumbledore will try using Legilimency on me?" Harry asked.

"No, but I don't want to take the chance." Lily lied, not wanting to alarm Harry.

Harry visibly relaxed. "Good."

"So, can I ask Sirius to check your defenses?" Lily herself wasn't that good at Occlumency or Legilimency.

Harry felt a little nervous. He didn't want Sirius finding out about the diary. "I don't know."

"Please, Harry. It's important. I can't do it. I don't have any talent for the mind arts." Lily begged.

Seeing how worried Lily was, Harry relented. "Okay, then."

Lily left, and after a short time came back with Sirius, who offered his hand to Harry. "Harry, I'm sorry I didn't tell you about Berus, but I was afraid you would refuse to come to the wedding or see Lily if I did."

"Lily's already explained, and I accept your apology." Harry really liked Sirius, and was glad that he hadn't deliberately lied to him, and happily shook the proffered hand.

"Lily said that Snape has already tried Legilimency on you before, so you'll know what to expect." Sirius stepped back slightly, and pulled out his wand.

"I do." Harry forced himself to relax.

"Legilimens." Sirius gently tested Harry's defenses, rather than trying to muscle his way in. He met constantly with resistance until he reached a small area covered with what appeared to be wood. At this point, to his surprise, Harry's barriers dropped and Sirius slide into Harry's mind.

Sirius found himself standing in the Shrieking Shack where he could see a gaunt, filthy haired man choking a boy who looked a lot like Harry. Sirius recoiled in shock, and the next thing he knew, he was laying on the floor with Lily leaning over him. "Sirius, are you alright?"

Sirius sat up. "Yes. Is Harry okay?"

"Harry's fine; a little shook-up but he's okay." Lily moved to the side to let Sirius see Harry.

Harry was pale faced. "I'm sorry, Sirius. I don't know what happened."

Sirius got unsteadily to his feet. "Harry, what was that?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't know."

Lily wondered what was going on. "What happened?"

"I found myself in a room. I watched as a man attacked a boy who looked a lot like Harry." Sirius' voice was slightly shaky.

"Who was the man?" Lily asked, although she had a feeling that she knew what Sirius was going to say.

"It was me. But it wasn't. My hair was filthy and matted, my skin looked yellowy and as tight as drum, and I was trying to strangle Harry." Sirius looked shocked at what he had seen. "I also noticed something else."

Harry hoped that Sirius hadn't spotted it. "What did you see?"

Sirius lifted Harry's hair up. "You had a lightning bolt scar on your forehead in the vision."

"I noticed it as well. I don't know what to say." Harry was nonplussed. He had no idea why he would have a scar there in his own mind.

"Did anything happen like this with Severus?" Lily asked.

Harry knew he would have to come clean. "Yes."

"What happened?" After his own experience, Sirius wanted to know what happened with Snape.

"I was standing in a room with the Professor. I was reaching out to him before I was pulled into some kind of blackness. I woke up calling out for my father." Harry explained.

Sirius' own altered visage prompted him to ask. "Did Snape look any different?"

Harry nodded. "He looked as if he'd been tortured."

"Do you think that you might be seeing the future?" Lily postulated.

“Why would Sirius look so awful, and why would he be trying to strangle me?” Harry countered.

Lily thought about it for a moment but could come up with no logical answer. “I really don’t know.

Sirius’ next question threw Harry. “Harry, did Remus tell you about using the Shrieking Shack?”

Harry nodded, not entirely sure where Sirius was going with his question. “Yes, he said he used to use it when he transformed. Why?”

“Did he ever take you there?” Sirius persisted in his line of questioning on the shack.

Harry shook his head. “No, why?”

“Because the room in your mind is the Shrieking Shack.” Sirius knew that Harry was telling the truth about not having been there by the boy’s surprised look at his statement.

“How do I know what it looks like?” Harry was confused.

“I don’t know. Harry, can I try again?” Sirius asked.

“Are you sure you’re okay?” Harry was concerned at Sirius’ pale visage.

“Yes.” Sirius lifted his wand at Harry’s nod. “Legilimens.”

Once again Sirius tried to slowly edge his way into Harry’s mind, only to find himself watching the same scene again. Seconds later, he once more found himself on the floor with Lily standing over him. “Sirius, Harry’s unconscious.”

Sirius pulled himself to his feet and moved to the bed. Harry had blood pouring out of his nose and Sirius waved his wand over him. “He’s ruptured a blood vessel in his nose; it must have been the shock of my trying again. I think he’s exhausted.”

Sirius healed Harry and covered the boy up. "I don't think we need to worry about Dumbledore getting in. From what I've seen and what Harry's just told us about Snape, it seems as if his mind only lets you see something nasty happening to you if you try to get in. We should let him get some sleep."

Lily kissed Harry on the forehead, and moved towards the door, only to turn back to her son once more. "Why did Dumbledore have to take him from me? I should have been there to see him grow up. I was the one who carried him inside of me; I gave birth to him; I should have been the one who read him bedtime stories; who comforted him when he cried; it should have been me seeing him off to Hogwarts on his first day, not my sister. I want my stolen time back, Sirius, I want it back."

Sirius watched helplessly as Lily stroked Harry's cheek, tears falling down her cheeks unchecked. "Lily, sweetheart, I'm so sorry."

Lily pulled her gaze away from Harry. "Prophecy or no, that bastard had no right to steal my son."

Sirius took Lily by the hand. "I know, Lily. Let's go to be bed. Harry's exhausted and you need some sleep too; you can see him in the morning."

Lily pushed Harry's hair out of his face and kissed his cheek. "Goodnight, my baby boy."

Sirius gently led a reluctant Lily out of the room and shut the door.

Once he was sure the door was shut, and he was alone, Harry opened his eyes. He'd come to just as Lily had kissed him on the forehead. He hadn't realized how hard this must have been on Lily. Only after listening to her talk about him, did Harry finally realize that Lily wasn't just someone who dumped him because she didn't care; she was the woman who'd spent nine months carrying him and who'd gone through the pain of childbirth to bring him into this world. And, if the stories were true, then she'd almost given up her own life defending him and his brother against Voldemort, only to have to go

through the heartbreak of thinking he'd died. He could only imagine how she must have felt when she'd discovered that he was alive, only for him to refuse to see her until now. Harry lay in bed thinking for most of the night, until he finally fell asleep just before dawn.

The next morning Harry was still asleep when Lily entered his room carrying a tray with his breakfast on it. "Harry, are you awake?"

Hearing Lily's voice, Harry shot up in bed before wincing. "Ouch."

Lily immediately put the tray down. "Are you okay?"

Harry grimaced. "I just sat up too quickly; I don't think my ribs are quite right yet."

Lily picked up a potion from the breakfast tray. "Sirius said you have to take this before breakfast."

Harry dutifully swallowed the potion and let out a sigh of relief as the pain subsided. "Thanks."

Lily placed the tray on the bed. "I'll leave you to eat your breakfast."

"Lily, please stay." Harry moved the tray onto the side table, and patted the bed.

Lily sat down. "Okay, but you've got to eat your breakfast."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not really that hungry. I need to ask you something."

"What is it?" Lily was worried at Harry's frowning face.

"What was the prophecy that led to Dumbledore stealing me and giving me to your sister?" Harry suddenly found it hard to call Nia his mum in front of Lily.

"How do you know about the prophecy?" Lily asked.

Harry blushed. "I came to when you were talking to Sirius last night. I'm sorry. I should have let you know that I was awake."

Lily looked down at her hands. "How much did you hear?"

"From when you kissed me on the forehead." Harry admitted.

"So you heard everything I said then?" Lily asked.

Harry nodded. "I'm sorry, yes. Lily, what is the prophecy?"

"Dumbledore told me that unless you were taken from me and deprived of my love, then your brother will be unable to defeat You-Know-Who. He told me you'd died, and I believed him." Lily had tears glistening in her eyes. "But if he hadn't taken you, then you wouldn't be the Harry you are today."

Harry knew Lily was right. "I wish Dumbledore hadn't stolen me, but I wouldn't have my Mum and Dad if he hadn't. I don't know how I'm supposed to be feeling."

"Neither do I, Harry." Lily admitted. "I think we just need to take things one step at a time."

Harry smiled at Lily. "Thanks, Lily."

"Now, you need to eat your breakfast." Lily bossed Harry into starting on the meal.

Harry ate his breakfast under his mother's watchful eye. "Can I go back to sleep now? I'm sorry but I didn't get much sleep last night."

Lily took the tray away. "Of course. There's a tailor coming this afternoon to measure you for an outfit for the wedding."

Harry looked uncomfortable. "I can ask Dad to bring me some clothing."

Lily shook her head. "You're going to be part of the wedding party, and you'll need to fit in."

“But Sirius didn’t say anything about being part of the wedding party.” Harry sounded panicked.

“Don’t worry, you don’t have to do anything. It’s mainly for the photos.” Lily explained.

Harry relaxed. “Okay then.”

Lily watched as Harry yawned. “I’ll leave you to get some sleep then.”

Harry was asleep before Lily had made it out of the door.

Narcissa’s Wedding

Harry sat down with Draco. The two of them had just seen Neville, his sister and mother to the floo exit. Alice Longbottom had offered to cover for Sirius and Craig that night, and she’d stayed as long as she could before having to leave. The after dinner speeches had now been made, and the two boys watched as Narcissa and Craig moved onto the dance floor.

“I’m surprised at how much like a muggle wedding it is.” Harry commented.

“I can’t remember. I’ve only been to one muggle wedding, but I was little and Aunt Lily took me.” Draco yawned.

Harry thought his friend looked tired. “I know how you feel. I’m just glad that most of it is over now.”

Draco grinned. “Me too. I was so nervous that I’d do something wrong.”

“You did really well. Was your mum okay? She looked as if her face was frozen when she was walking up the aisle. I’ve never seen anyone look that cold.” Harry looked apologetic as he spoke.

“That’s just Mum’s way of hiding her nerves. Just before we started up the aisle, she said she thought she was going to be sick.” Draco informed Harry.

“I bet she’s glad that it’s all over then.” Harry looked at Narcissa, who was smiling happily at her new husband.

“She’s not the only one. I thought that photographer would never finish.” Draco hated having his photo taken.

“I felt really uncomfortable being in the photos. It’s not as if I’m really part of your family.” Harry half-wished he had said no to attending the wedding.

“Mum said she wanted you in them. After all, you’re her best friend’s eldest son, and Mum really does care about Aunt Lily.” Draco pointed out. “Anyway, you’re one of my best friends as well.”

“Yes, but that hardly makes me family.” Harry looked around the room until he found where his half-siblings were sitting. “I think Anna would agree with me.”

Draco looked at Anna, who was currently staring daggers at Harry. “Yep, I think you’re right. She really hates the fact that you stole her big brother’s inheritance, doesn’t she?”

“That’s what she said. It doesn’t matter that Jamie and I have managed to get along, she still refuses to have anything to do with me.” Harry wished his sister would thaw a little towards him.

“I’ve known her all my life, and she doesn’t like me either. Cassie is an angel though, and Orion is a good kid.” Draco waved at his cousins who smiled and waved at him. Jamie, who was seated with them, just ignored him.

“I know. I really like the two of them. I’m hoping to get permission for them to come and see the last match between Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff in May.” Harry had asked Sirius to see if he could sort something out.

“That would be fun.” Draco exclaimed. “You haven’t invited Anna have you?”

Harry nodded. “I did, but she refused. I’ll leave things with her for a while and see if she changes.”

“I wouldn’t hold your breath.” Draco commented, just as his mother walked up to him.

“Draco, would you care to do your mother the honor of dancing with her?” Narcissa smiled sweetly at her son.

Draco stood up and followed his mother onto the dance floor. Harry was just thinking that he was glad it wasn’t him, when Lily came to stand in front of him.

“Harry, would you like to dance with me?” Lily asked.

“I don’t dance very well.” Harry tried to excuse himself.

“That’s okay; nobody’s going to care.” Lily grabbed her son’s hand and pulled him onto the dance floor.

“I’m really glad you came tonight. You look a lot like James with your hair cut short.” Lily ruffled Harry’s hair.

“So I’ve been told.” Harry had agreed to cut his hair short for the wedding. After the tenth person had told him how much like James Potter he looked, Harry was getting fed up. “It’s been funny watching people’s faces when I tell them that my father is Remus.”

Remus was currently sat with Sirius watching the couples dancing together. Narcissa had invited both Nia and Remus, but Nia hadn’t wanted to attend, preferring to stay home with her children.

Lily laughed out loud. “I bet that confused everyone.”

“It did. One woman even asked if I was sure!” Harry had been dismayed at how many people had picked up on the likeness between him and James Potter.

"It's a good job then that no-one knows who you really are. Look at poor Jamie." Lily looked across to her second-born, who was currently fending off the attentions of several matrons.

"I know. I can't decide if they are trying to be friendly with him because he's the Boy Who Lived, or because they think he's the Potter heir." Harry was glad that no-one was aware yet of whom he really was.

"Just wait until the news about you being alive and that you're the Potter heir breaks. Then it'll be your turn." Lily teased her son.

"No thanks. The longer that news stays quiet, the better." Engrossed in the conversation, Harry failed to notice a small bug sitting in his mother's hair take flight into the air and exit out of a window.

The two finished their dance and Harry returned to his seat. The rest of the evening passed pleasantly, and before he knew it, Harry found himself back at the Blacks' house. He and Draco were going to share a room until they returned to school on Monday morning.

Valentine's Day

Harry entered the Great Hall, only to stop in shock at the sight that met his eyes. The entire Hall was decorated in pink; the tables, the chairs, even the walls. Harry felt something touch his face, and looked up to see pink heart-shaped confetti falling from the ceiling, like snow. Trying to ignore his surroundings, Harry headed for the Ravenclaw table where Luna was already seated.

"Hi, Harry." Luna seemed unaffected by the pink world around her.

"What's going on?" Harry asked.

"It's Valentine's Day, Harry." Luna pointed out, thinking it strange Harry hadn't noticed.

"I know that, Luna, but what's with all the pinkness?" Harry persevered.

At that moment Lockhart stood up at the teachers' table. "Good morning, everyone. Professor Dumbledore gave me permission to decorate the hall this morning to celebrate this momentous day."

Harry noticed that Dumbledore was fortuitously missing. He also noticed that Professor Snape looked as if he was going to be sick.

"I've arranged for your Valentines to be delivered today by some friends of mine." At Lockhart's words, twelve grumpy looking dwarves entered the Great Hall. Lockhart continued speaking. "Thank you to all those who sent me Valentines."

Most of the girls sighed at Lockhart's recognition of their efforts.

Harry watched as one of the dwarves walked up to Ginny Prewett, and starting reciting a Valentine to her. "You are celestial, You are divine, Ginevra Prewett, Will you be mine?"

Harry didn't have to wonder for very long who had sent the nauseating Valentine, as he watched Blaise Zabini get up and kiss Ginny on the hand. He then said something to her to which Ginny simply nodded, before turning her attention back to her breakfast.

Harry's interest was then drawn back to his own table as he heard Dudley let out a whimper. "Please don't tell me you sent me a singing Valentine, Luna."

Luna shook her head. "Don't be daft, Dudley. You don't know what might be infesting them. I've kept your card safe upstairs."

Dudley looked thankful. "I've got one for you too. Let's go get them."

The pair left Harry, and walked off hand in hand out of the room. Harry watched them leave, and as he did so, he was horrified to see a dwarf heading in his direction. Unable to get away, he had to sit and listen to it recite the Valentine intended for him.

'Lilies are white

Roses are red

Who's going to miss you

When you're dead?'

The entire Hall fell silent at the dwarf's words. Harry just sat there, unable to believe what he was hearing. He looked across to Jamie, who shook his head silently.

Lockhart got up. "Well, I think that will be all for the moment for Valentines. My cupids will, however, be making deliveries throughout the day."

Harry was dumbfounded. He couldn't believe someone would send him such a malicious Valentine. Little did he know that things were about to get much worse.

He'd been about to get up to get away from everyone staring, when the sound of beating wings signaled the arrival of the mail. Harry watched as Hedwig flew in and dropped a copy of the Daily Prophet in front of him. Passing her a piece of bacon, Harry opened up the newspaper, only to drop it back on the table at the sight of the headlines.

'Boy Who Lived's Twin Survives'

Special Report by Rita Skeeter

It would appear that the old rumors of Jamie Potter having a twin are indeed true. Furthermore, not only does it appear that the Boy Who Lived had a twin, but it would seem that his brother survived the attack by You-Know-Who. See page 6 for full details of You-Know-Who's attack on the Potters.

Jamie Potter's brother would appear to be none other than Harry Lupin, the same second year involved in the mysterious attack on fellow second year student Pansy Parkinson. Had Pansy found out something she shouldn't have?

Lupin was spotted making an appearance at the high society wedding of Narcissa Black and debonair healer, Craig Delaney. During a dance with his mother, Lily Black, this reporter is reliably informed that mention was made of Lupin being the Potter heir and not, as originally thought, Jamie Potter.

Can it be true? Is Harry Lupin the new Duke of Harbridge? This reporter will bring you news as soon as it is available.

Harry looked round the Great Hall. Everywhere children were reading the Prophet and whispering and pointing.

“Harry.” Cho’s voice interrupted Harry’s observations.

“Yes, Cho. It’s true.” Harry angrily anticipated what the girl had been about to ask him.

A gasp rose from the Ravenclaw table, and Harry got up, only for Cho to stop him. “I was going to ask if you wanted to go and get some quidditch practice in.”

Harry blushed. “Sorry, I thought you were going to ask about the piece in the Prophet.”

Cho picked up the book she had been reading. “I haven’t read the Prophet yet. I was trying to finish this book.”

The whispers around Harry were now intensifying. “I’m sorry, but I’ve got to go.”

Harry got up and fled, with both Jamie and Hermione following closely behind him.

“Harry, wait up.” Jamie called out.

“Let’s go into this classroom.” Hermione grabbed Harry by the arm, once he had stopped at Jamie’s hail.

All three children went into the classroom. Jamie looked at Hermione. "This has nothing to do with you, Snape."

"She can stay if she wants to." Harry defended his friend.

"Thank you, Harry." Hermione looked smugly at Jamie.

"Did you speak to the Prophet?" Jamie asked.

"Are you mad? Of course not. Having my private life splashed across the front of the Daily Prophet is not my idea of fun." Harry replied heatedly.

Jamie looked a little abashed. "Sorry, but where else could they have got the information from?"

Harry was mystified. "I've no idea. When I was dancing with Lily, there was no-one else around. I can't see how anyone could have overheard us, particularly with the loud music playing."

"Well someone did, and they've only blabbed it to the worst reporter ever." Jamie hated Skeeter. He'd had too many run-ins with the nosey reporter.

"Well there's nothing we can do about it now. I'm sorry but the entire Ravenclaw table is aware it's true. I thought Cho was going to ask me about the story and I just bit her head off." Harry admitted.

"It doesn't matter. I suppose I'd better go and find Cho and fill her in on the full details." Jamie looked glum; he wondered if Cho would still be interested in him after finding out that he wasn't the Potter heir.

"Jamie, I'm really sorry." Despite their previous animosity, Harry now felt bad for his brother.

"It's okay. I've got to go." Jamie walked out of the room.

Hermione turned to Harry. "You know what this means don't you?"

Harry nodded. "Yeah, I'm probably going to be bombarded with wedding offers when I'm old enough."

Hermione nodded. "At least your rank ensures that you can decline them without offending anyone."

"Thank goodness. I'd hate to find myself in the same predicament you're in." Harry shuddered at the thought.

"Do you want to take a walk?" Hermione asked, forgetting it was snowing outside.

Harry shook his head. "I'm just going to get some studying done. I'll see you later."

Hermione impulsively kissed Harry on the cheek. "Hang in there, the whispering will die down eventually."

"Thanks." Harry turned and left the room.

Later that week

"So this is where Your Grace is hiding."

Harry groaned as Fred and George plonked themselves down on either side of him.

"So, Harry, hiding from the ladies are we?" Fred cackled quietly at his twin's comment.

"What do you think? I've had girls I don't even know trying to talk to me; some of them are even seventh years!" Harry had had enough and had tried hiding in the back of the stacks in the library. He should have known that the twins would track him down.

"Don't worry, mate. They'll get fed up soon enough..." George started.

"but if they don't, we'll take the good looking ones off your hands." Fred leered suggestively.

"Thanks guys, I think." Harry laughed for the first time in almost a week.

"I'm meeting Daphne in ten minutes, so I've got to go." Fred got up, all traces of humor gone from his face.

Harry sensibly stayed quiet but George teased his twin until Fred turned George's hair pink, and then sailed out of the library.

After returning his hair to its natural color, George turned to Harry. "So what lesson have you got next?" Fred asked.

"DADA." Harry said looking fed up.

"I pity you. I just wish the end of the year would come quicker. Perhaps the Heir of Slytherin will off Lockhart and put an end to all our miseries." George really loathed the Defense teacher.

"He's not that bad." Harry knew Lockhart wasn't a good teacher but he wouldn't have wanted to see him dead.

"Who are you trying to kid, Harry?" George looked at Harry in surprise. "Look at what he did to you on the quidditch pitch."

"He's not that bad. According to Sirius, Lockhart was trying to help me; things just didn't go quite the way he expected." Harry defended his teacher's actions.

"You're completely mad. He's a menace. He nearly killed you." George pointed out.

"Everyone makes mistakes, especially..." Harry stopped talking. He'd been about to say 'especially when they're more concerned about their own appearances than anything else', but had stopped because he could see Lockhart's reflection in the window to the side of him.

"Especially when they're a moron, right Harry?" George laughed, but quickly shut up as Lockhart revealed himself.

“Thank you, Mr. Lupin, for your confidence in me. I would have been able to finish healing you if I’d been left to finish the spell. However, my concentration was ruined by Professor Snape’s misguided belief that you’d die if I continued my ministrations.” Lockhart smiled heartily at Harry.

George kept his eyes on the table, hoping Lockhart would ignore what he had said; he couldn’t face another evening addressing envelopes. Sadly his hopes were dashed at Lockhart’s next words. “Mr. Weasley, detention for disrespecting a teacher. You will come to my rooms this Friday at 7pm. Please bring a quill.”

George smothered a groan. “Yes, Professor.”

Harry watched as Lockhart flounced out of the room. “Sorry, George. I only just saw him in the window. I didn’t have time to warn you.”

“So much for taking care of your friends, eh, Harry?” George said to his sheepish looking friend.

“There was nothing I could do.” Harry protested.

George got up. “I wonder if there are any girls who might like to have a chat with our newest Duke.”

Harry didn’t hang around to find out, and hurried out of the library.

10th April 1993

Even though there had been no more attacks, Hermione continued to trawl through all the books she could find on magical creatures, and she was sitting in the library looking through the last of the books, when she suddenly gasped.

Harry looked up. ‘What’s wrong, Hermione?’

“I think I know what the creature in the Chamber is.” Hermione turned the book she was reading around so Harry could see it.

"A basilisk?" Harry quickly read the inscription in the book. "You could be right, but why didn't anyone die?"

Hermione thought for a moment. "Perhaps Prewett only saw it's reflection in the window in the corridor. The moon was quite bright that night."

"I'll give you that, but what about Pansy?" Harry asked.

"She was found in the girls' bathroom where Moaning Myrtle is." Hermione began.

"But I don't see how that could have saved her." Harry interjected.

"It was really wet the last time we went in there, perhaps she saw its reflection in a puddle on the floor." Hermione theorized.

"Okay, but why would she be looking at..." Harry was interrupted by a white-faced Neville running into the library.

"Harry, Hermione, come quick, it's Draco." Neville didn't bother to wait for the two children and ran off.

Hermione and Harry looked at each before dropping everything and running after Neville. They soon saw what had upset the boy so much. Just a short distance up the corridor they found the Grey Lady floating in front of Draco, looking as if she was full of smoke.

"Why isn't she moving?" Harry asked.

"I think she's been petrified." Hermione looked away from the Grey Lady down to Draco. "I think he's been petrified too. He looks like Prewett did when I tripped up over him that night at the Ball."

Harry wasn't happy about seeing his friend looking so deathlike on the floor, but he was also worried about whether the basilisk might still be around. "Hermione, don't you think we'd better get out of here?"

Suddenly realizing that Harry was right, Hermione followed Harry and Neville back into the library. As much as the two of them still avoided Madam Pince as much as they could, they knew that they had to tell someone.

“Excuse me, Madam Pince.” Hermione began tentatively.

“What do you want, Miss Snape?” Irma responded coldly towards the girl.

“There’s been an incident involving Draco Black. I think a teacher needs to be told.” Neville smiled winningly at the librarian.

Neville’s effort made little difference. To Irma, Neville was still just another annoying child. “Well then Longbottom, I suggest you go get one.”

Thankfully Severus chose that moment to enter the library. “What is going on here?”

“Papa, Draco’s been attacked.” Hermione grabbed her father’s hand and pulled him towards the exit. “Didn’t you see him on your way in?”

“I must have come from the opposite direction.” Severus followed the children to where the Grey Lady and Draco were.

Hermione offered up her supposition. “I think it might be a basilisk.”

Severus looked around the corridor and started walking back towards the library. “Follow me.”

The three children followed Severus back into the library. “Madam Pince, you will secure this room and everyone in it. No-one is to leave until I say so.”

“Of course, Professor Snape.” Irma had little choice but to obey Severus, but did so grudgingly.

Severus left and watched as the door was shut. He then headed for the Headmaster’s office to inform him of the latest attack.

Thanks to pstibbons for helping me decide on a career for Lily.

For those of you who expected fireworks when Harry and Jamie met, sorry! Jamie might be a hothead when initially faced with a situation he isn't happy with, but he has a tendency to think out what is the best way he can get what he wants.

Next chapter: Lucius makes an appearance; Hagrid is arrested; Dumbledore resigns; Harry and Jamie go into the Chamber; someone makes the ultimate sacrifice; and the petrifications are reversed.

I'm afraid I'm going to be away again until Monday evening with no internet connection (how will I cope?!). This means that the next update probably won't be until the weekend of the 26th.

Chapter 26: Into the Chamber

The Next Day

Albus watched as Lucius Malfoy entered his office walking in behind Cornelius Fudge. "Minister Fudge, how can I be of assistance?"

"I'm sorry, Dumbledore, but I'm here to take Hagrid in. There have been too many attacks in the last few months, and the last one on Draco Black is the final straw. People are calling for action." Fudge didn't look the least bit regretful.

"And Mr. Malfoy, what I can do for you?" Albus asked, having a feeling that Malfoy was "the people" Fudge had mentioned.

"I have an order calling for your resignation signed by all the Governors of this school." Lucius smiled maliciously at Dumbledore. "You will vacate this office and leave Hogwarts immediately."

Albus knew that the Governors must have been pressured by Malfoy into calling for his resignation. However, knowing he had little choice, Albus agreed to leave without making a fuss. "Very well. I'll ask Minerva to step in and take over the running of the school."

"That will be acceptable." Lucius inclined his head, and took his leave of the two men, secure in the knowledge that Dumbledore would finally be out of the school.

"Cornelius, I must ask that you reconsider taking Hagrid in. He's done nothing wrong." Albus turned his attention to the Minister.

"I'm sorry, Albus, but it has to be done." Cornelius turned and also left the room to join the Aurors waiting for him at the bottom of the staircase.

Albus frowned slightly, but then turned his attention to packing up the items he didn't want left behind, and floo called Minerva. "Minerva, could you please come to my office? You can come through the fireplace."

Minerva stepped into the Headmaster's office, and brushed off her clothing. "Yes, Albus, what can I do for you?"

"I have to leave Hogwarts for a while. I'll need you to take over running the school while I am gone." Albus didn't bother to tell Minerva that he had been forced to resign; she would find out soon enough. "I've already keyed you into the fireplace, and the school wards. You just need to change the passwords."

"Of course, Albus. I'll change everything as soon as you've gone." Minerva wondered how long Dumbledore was going to be gone for; if he'd keyed her into the wards, and given her the ability to change the access passwords, then she had a feeling it might be a long term absence.

"Thank you." Albus picked up his things and disappeared into the fireplace.

Minerva sat down. Seeing a scroll on the table, she picked it up. It was a notice calling for Dumbledore's resignation. She had a feeling that Dumbledore had deliberately left it lying there, knowing she would pick it up. Looking around, Minerva noticed the surreptitious glances she was being given by the portraits hanging on the wall. She pulled out her wand, and uttered the "Lethargus Permaximum" spell ensuring that all the portraits fell deeply asleep. She felt more relaxed now that she knew that there would be no spies looking down at her from the walls. Minerva thought for a moment, and then scanned the room for any monitoring spells. Finding none she smiled contentedly, and decided to reset the passwords as Dumbledore had requested. Placing her hand on the miniature gargoyle carved into the post to the left of the desk, Minerva changed the password to the office, and she then repeated the action with the gargoyle over the fireplace. Now only she, or anyone she gave permission to, could floo in and out of the office.

Bending down at the fireplace, Minerva threw a small amount of floo powder into the fire. "Filius Flitwick."

Flitwick's head appeared after a short time. "Filius, could you please come through?"

Filius stepped out of the fireplace and stood beside Minerva. "What's happened?"

"Dumbledore has been forced to resign." Minerva showed Filius the scroll.

Filius looked nervously around, and Minerva realized what was worrying him. "It's okay, the portraits have been rendered ineffective, I've checked for monitoring spells, and I have ensured that no-one can enter this tower unless I say so."

Reassured, Filius started questioning Minerva. "Do you think Dumbledore will be back soon, or that the change will be permanent?"

"You know how many contacts Dumbledore has. I therefore don't expect the change to be permanent." Minerva had been filled in on some of Dumbledore's more shady affiliations by Filius.

Filius thought for a moment. "Did he tell you how to contact him?"

Minerva shook her head. "No, he didn't."

"Damn. We've got no idea where he'll be now. I need to report this immediately. Can you open the fireplace up for me?" Filius asked urgently.

Minerva nodded. "Yes, of course. Do you want to come back that way as well?"

Filius nodded. "It would save time. I don't really want to be away for too long."

Minerva keyed Filius into the wards for the fireplace and watched as the diminutive professor was whisked away by the flames. Sitting down at Dumbledore's desk, Minerva played with the necklace made of edelweiss. It had taken some doing, but Filius and his team had eventually been able to remove the charm from the necklace; unfortunately it had also nearly killed Minerva in the process. Flitwick

had also revealed himself to be Leo Flamel but he still hadn't told Minerva where to find the real Flitwick.

Leo had then given Minerva a charm to help protect her mind from unwanted intrusions. He had explained that whilst it wouldn't stand up to a direct attack, it should be enough to thwart Dumbledore, and anyone else attempting to access her mind. Leo theorized that as long as she did as she was told, and still wore the necklace, then it would be unlikely that Dumbledore would suspect that Minerva was no longer under his aegis, and use Legilimency on her anyway. If Dumbledore did attack her, then Minerva had been equipped with a portkey to whisk her to safety. While the School wards didn't allow portkey transportation for incoming visitors unless they were keyed into the wards, no such measures had been instigated for outward bound visitors; something Minerva hadn't felt was particularly wise but she had been overruled by Dumbledore.

Minerva had been curious about Leo's own resistance to Legilimency, particularly as he'd admitted to being a poor student of the mind arts. He'd explained that he'd had a conversation, once the true Flitwick had left, in which he'd led Dumbledore to believe that he was a full goblin. Even though he didn't look like a full goblin, Leo had explained away his appearance as being something that sometimes happened in goblin families, sort of like wizarding squibs. Leo had admitted that this was something most goblins were embarrassed about; hence it's not being general knowledge. Upon learning of this, Dumbledore had had to take Leo at his word. Some strange things had happened to wizards who had tried to enter goblins' minds for information. Even now, there were a few cases of wizards who had tried the same thing and now believed that they were dragons. These wizards currently spent their time in St. Mungo's trying to breathe fire and fly, and Dumbledore had had no desire to join their ranks.

Minerva sniggered to herself at the thought of Dumbledore trying to flap around his office and attempting to breathe fire. Pulling herself together, she settled down to get some paperwork done.

19th May 1993

Harry sat in the library going over the letter he was sending to Lily. The two of them had been corresponding regularly ever since Narcissa's wedding, and Harry now felt much closer to his birth mother as a result.

Hermione was also seated at the table, finishing her homework for DADA. Lockhart had told them to produce three feet, and she had just surpassed her fifth foot. She hoped that it wouldn't be too long. Then again, she decided that because it was a detailed account of some of Lockhart's own adventures, she was pretty sure he wouldn't mind reading about himself.

Harry stopped writing. "Hermione, I've been thinking about what happened to Draco."

Hermione sighed. "Harry, it really isn't your fault what happened to Draco."

Harry shook his head. "I didn't say it was. I was just thinking about how the basilisk must be getting around. We didn't see it after it attacked Draco, and neither did your father on his way to the library."

"I honestly haven't thought that much about it." Hermione fell silent as she pondered on what Harry had brought up.

Harry decided to continue his letter to Lily later and began his homework. He had just started writing about Ooglebod the 'Orrible, when Hermione clutched his arm, making him jump. "Hermione, what's wrong?"

"I've got it. It's using the pipes. Think about it, they run all along the school." Hermione's eyes were shining brightly in excitement at her deduction.

"I think you might be on to something." Harry admitted. "But if it's using the pipes, then where is it surfacing in the school?"

Hermione furrowed her brow and thought. This time Harry beat her to it. "How about Moaning Myrtle's bathroom? That's where they found Pansy."

“We need to get in there.” Even as she spoke, Hermione knew there was little chance of that happening. “But there’s no way without a teacher escorting us.”

Ever since Draco’s petrification, all classes were now escorted from place to place to ensure the safety of the pupils. Professor McGonagall had even gone as far as allowing Aurors to be brought in to help with the situation.

“I might have a way.” A voice coming from the darkness of the stacks interrupted them.

Harry looked up as his twin revealed himself. “Jamie, if you know of a way, you’ve got to help. It’s important.”

“I’m happy to tell you, but I’m not letting your Slytherin friend in on it.” Jamie looked disdainfully at Hermione.

Even though Jamie had made a lot of headway in his relationship with Harry, things between him and Hermione had still not improved.

Harry looked at Hermione. “I’ll be back shortly.”

“Harry, you’re not going alone. I’m coming with you.” Hermione protested.

“If she comes too, Harry, then no deal.” Jamie was adamant.

“Hermione, if I’m not back within half an hour, then tell someone where I’ve gone.” Harry was glad that Hermione couldn’t go with him. He didn’t like to think what Severus would do to him if something happened to her.

Realizing that Jamie was unlikely to back down, and desperate to solve the puzzle, Hermione pouted, and then finally relented. “Okay, but if you’re not back, I’m telling my father.”

Harry smiled at Hermione before turning to Jamie. “Let’s go then.”

Jamie pulled Harry into the stacks and not out of the library as Harry expected. "Where are we going?"

"Just shut up and come with me." Jamie led Harry into the depths of the stacks.

Harry followed silently until they reached the far corner of the library. "So what's your plan?"

Jamie pulled out a piece of material. "This. It's an invisibility cloak. You can't tell Snape about it though."

"Don't worry, I won't. Where did you get it?" Harry touched it gently.

Jamie avoided the truth. "A friend of the family."

The two boys slipped beneath the cloak and made their way silently out of the library. Heading down to the second floor, the boys eventually reached the girls' bathroom and Jamie pulled the cloak off.

Harry was pleased to see Myrtle emerge from one of the toilet cubicles. "Hi Myrtle."

"Hi Harry. Who's this?" She nodded towards Jamie.

"My brother Jamie."

"Hi Jamie. I'm Myrtle." Myrtle fluttered her eyelashes at Jamie.

Jamie didn't know what to do with himself. "Hi Myrtle. I'm, err, pleased to meet you."

Myrtle giggled. "What can I do for you boys?"

"Remember that you said that you'd seen me in here before?" Harry reminded the ghostly girl.

"Yes." Myrtle smiled coquettishly at Harry.

"I was wondering, did you see what I was doing?" Harry ignored Myrtle's flirting.

"No, I heard you speaking in a funny language, and by the time I came out of the cubicle, you were turning away from the sinks over there." Myrtle informed Harry.

Harry was frustrated as he learned that Myrtle must have only seen him exiting the bathroom.

Jamie butted in. "Myrtle, how did you die?"

Harry couldn't believe his twin's insensitivity. "Jamie!"

Myrtle on the other hand was ecstatic. "No-one's ever bothered to ask me before. Do you really want to know?"

Jamie ignored Harry's shushing from his left and nodded his head. "Yes, Myrtle."

"Well, I was hiding in here because Olive Hornby had been teasing me and I was upset. I was trying to get some privacy when I heard a boy talking; actually, it sounded like the funny sounds you were making, Harry." Myrtle started to get off topic.

"And...?" Jamie steered the ghostly back on track.

"I opened the toilet door to tell him to get out, and I died." Myrtle told Jamie in a matter of fact voice.

"How can you just die?" Jamie asked scornfully.

Myrtle shrugged her shoulders. "I just saw a pair of yellow eyes and that was it, I floated off and I've been here ever since."

Harry took the lead back from Jamie. "Thanks Myrtle. You've been really helpful."

"Anytime, Harry." After winking at Jamie, Myrtle shot into the air and disappeared down the nearest toilet.

“What was all that about?” Jamie asked.

“I’m not sure yet. I need to talk to Hermione.” Harry answered.

“Let’s get back then.” Jamie pulled out his cloak.

Just as Harry was about to slip under the cloak, a thought suddenly occurred to him. “Why were you listening to my conversation in the library?”

“I wanted to talk to you, and I was waiting for the right moment.” Jamie explained.

“Is something wrong?” Harry asked.

Jamie nodded his head. “Cho dumped me. She said that I’m too selfish and only think of myself. I’ve been trying really hard as well. She’s apparently got a penfriend who understands her better than I do.”

Harry felt an icy chill run down his spine at the mention of a penfriend. “Did she give you the penfriend’s name?”

Jamie nodded again. “Yes, Ron or Tom or something like that.”

“We’ve got to find her.” Harry was alarmed.

“Why, what’s wrong?” Jamie was troubled by Harry’s white face.

“She’s in a lot of danger from Tom.” Harry informed his twin.

“How do you know Tom, and why is she in danger?” Jamie held the cloak away from Harry.

“I haven’t got time to explain now. Cho’s life could be in danger.” Harry grabbed the cloak and pulled it over himself.

Realizing that Harry would leave him in the bathroom unless he got under the cloak with him, Jamie slid under it as well and the two boys left the bathroom and headed towards Ravenclaw tower.

Just before arriving at the entrance to the tower, Harry pulled the cloak off the two boys and stuffed it up his sweater.

The auror on duty outside the door was surprised to see two unescorted students. "Where's your escort?"

Harry played it dumb. "What escort?"

"The one you're supposed to have... Never mind, just get inside." The auror spoke the password, not noticing that Jamie wasn't a Ravenclaw.

Once inside, Harry looked round the common room but couldn't see Cho. "Marietta, have you seen Cho?"

"No, perhaps she's upstairs. Do you want me to look?" Marietta smiled sweetly at Harry.

"Please." Harry stood tensely as he waited for Marietta to return. "Is she there?"

Marietta shook her head. "Perhaps she's in the library."

Harry dragged Jamie up to his dormitory. "Let's put the cloak on and go check."

Jamie acquiesced to Harry's suggestion and the two boys headed out of Ravenclaw tower. The auror was surprised to see the door opening, and after checking, he shut it again, believing that he hadn't shut it properly after the two boys had gone into the tower.

On reaching the library Harry looked to see if he could see Cho. After failing to locate her, Harry whispered urgently to Jamie. "Don't let anyone know we're here. I want to check the toilets on the second floor again."

“Why?” Jamie couldn’t believe Harry wanted to go back down there.

“Just trust me, okay?” Harry begged.

Jamie shrugged his shoulders and the two boys disappeared out of the library. It was only when they were almost down to the second floor that Harry remembered that he hadn’t told Hermione he was alright.

This time, however, the boys were unable to access the toilets. The entrance was barred by most of the teachers. Harry pulled Jamie into a nearby alcove, and together they watched what was happening.

“I don’t believe it.” Minerva shook her head.

“We need to go after her.” Filius sounded determined.

“But we don’t know where the Chamber is.” Minerva pointed out.

“It was so unfortunate I wasn’t here when she was taken.” Lockhart flicked his hair over shoulder. “I know the perfect spell for dealing with a basilisk.”

Minerva had informed the staff of what Severus’ daughter believed to be hidden inside the Chamber.

“That’s all well and good, Lockhart. But unless we know where the girl has been taken, we can hardly mount a rescue.” Severus’ voice dripped with sarcasm.

“I need to close the school, and inform Miss Chang’s parents of what has happened.” Minerva turned away from the teachers and headed towards her office.

Harry felt Jamie start at his side, so Harry took the precaution of putting his hand over his brother’s mouth to stop him from saying anything. Once the teachers had all left the area, the two boys headed towards the bathroom. There on the wall were scrawled the words “Her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever.”

“How can they know it’s Cho’s skeleton?” Jamie asked.

Harry had spotted something Jamie hadn’t. “I saw Professor Flitwick holding her book bag. She must have dropped it.”

Jamie questioned his brother. “Harry, how did you know about Tom, and that Cho was in danger?”

“I’ve also been writing to Tom by way of a diary. The diary disappeared just before Christmas. I lost it somewhere and I think Cho must have picked it up.” Harry confessed.

Jaime was confused. “What’s so awful about this Tom and the diary?”

“I think Tom was controlling me by way of the diary. I think because of him, I led Pansy Parkinson up here and allowed her to be petrified. The diary isn’t a kid’s toy. I think it somehow contains Tom who used to go to school here.” Harry explained.

“I’ve never heard of anyone living in a diary. That’s just daft.” Jamie thought Harry was messing him around.

Harry shook his head. “No, it’s not. I think the diary is dangerous and that Cho has it. If I’m right, then Tom’s probably using it to control her.

Jamie finally realized that Harry wasn't joking. “So because of an evil diary that you lost, this Tom has taken Cho into the Chamber to kill her?”

Harry nodded his head. “Yes, I think that’s exactly what’s he's planning to do.”

Jamie spoke urgently. “If you’re right, then we’ve got to find the Chamber. Do you know where it is?”

“I think it’s somewhere in Myrtle’s bathroom, but we’ve got to tell a teacher. We don’t know what might be down there.” Harry was reluctant to go into the Chamber alone.

"I know. Let's get Lockhart. You heard him. He said he knows how to deal with a basilisk." Jamie started to drag Harry up the corridor.

"Lockhart? He can barely tie his own shoelaces." Harry scoffed.

"Harry, it's your fault Cho is down in the Chamber." Jamie played on Harry's guilt.

"Okay, fine. Let's get Lockhart then." Harry knew that the teacher was totally incompetent but feeling guilty about his part in Cho's disappearance, he went with his twin to tell Lockhart.

On entering Lockhart's room, the two boys were surprised to discover that most of Lockhart's possessions had been packed away.

Jamie looked shocked. "Sir, where are you going?"

"I've been called away on urgent business." Lockhart lied.

"But we need you." Jamie said desperately.

"What for?" Lockhart asked.

"We heard about Cho, and that you know how to deal with a basilisk. We thought that you could perhaps help us defeat it when we go into the Chamber." Harry smiled ingenuously at his teacher.

It was now Gilderoy's turn to be shocked. "You know where the Chamber is?"

Jamie took up the conversation again. "We think it's in Myrtle's bathroom. Please, Professor, we really need your help."

Gilderoy pretended to debate the matter. He knew that the entrance to the Chamber couldn't be in the bathroom. The teachers had searched every inch when they found Pansy petrified there.

Picking up his wand, Gilderoy headed for the door. "Let's go boys."

Harry still didn't believe that Lockhart was going to be of any use, but followed him and his brother out of the office and down the corridor to Myrtle's bathroom.

On entering, Gilderoy turned to Harry. "Okay my boy. Where's the entrance?"

Harry walked round the bathroom looking for anything that might indicate an entrance.

Myrtle appeared at his side. "Harry, try by the sinks; remember that I said that that's where you were when I saw you that time."

Harry thanked Myrtle and walked over to the sinks. Looking carefully at them, he spotted a tap with a snake etched into it. "I think I may have found it."

Lockhart didn't move, but Jamie rushed to stand by his brother. "Where is it?"

"I think it's behind this sink." Harry then turned his attention back to the sink. Concentrating he hissed "open" at it, and the sink began to move.

"You're a parselmouth." Jamie stepped back in horror. Lockhart too was looking horrified at Harry's newly revealed ability.

"Be glad that I am. Otherwise you wouldn't be getting into the chamber." Harry pointed out.

Jamie realized that Harry was right. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because of the reaction I knew I'd get, and I saw how everyone treated Hermione when they first found out about her being a parselmouth." Harry pointed out.

Jamie looked chastised. "Sorry, Harry."

Harry turned to look Lockhart. "Are you coming then, Professor?"

Lockhart shook his head. "We need to fetch the aurors."

"But Cho might die." Jamie pulled out his wand. "You can beat the basilisk; you said so."

Harry pushed Jamie's wand down. "Leave him. If he doesn't want to come, he doesn't have to."

Lockhart let out a deep breath. "I'll keep watch. If you don't come back, I'll raise the alarm."

"Thanks, Professor." Harry said, sarcasm tingeing his voice.

Not recognizing the sarcasm for what it was, Lockhart beamed. "Not at all, Harry, not at all."

Harry and Jamie disappeared into the hole, which quickly closed behind them.

Lockhart sat down to wait. He could just see the headlines now. 'Brave Professor In Desperate Bid to Save Students'.

The Library

Hermione cast tempus. Harry had been gone for nearly 40 minutes. Quickly she jumped up and ran towards the exit, only for an auror to stop her from leaving.

"I'm sorry, Miss Snape, but you can't go anywhere at the moment. We've been told to stop all the students from going anywhere." The auror gently turned Hermione around.

"But I need to speak to my father." Hermione protested.

"I'll get a message to him." The auror promised.

Knowing she was defeated, Hermione gave him the message and returned to her seat.

The Hospital Wing

Sirius got up from speaking with Poppy and headed towards the exit. He could feel Berus shifting around his neck. "I think I'll walk into Hogsmeade instead of flooing back."

Poppy looked out of the window. "At least you've got nice sunny weather to do it in. I'll see you in a few days then Sirius."

Sirius smiled at the nurse and headed out of the infirmary. Once outside he cast a silencing spell and started talking to the snake wrapped around his neck. "I can't believe I let you talk me into this. I'll take you up to the second floor. You can make your own way from there. At least if anyone sees me, I can pretend I was going to see Minerva."

Berus hissed quietly at him and gently nudged his face. Lily had wanted to see Harry and Jamie, and so Sirius had agreed to smuggle her in the next time he had a meeting with Poppy about the trainee healers' progress.

Sirius reached the second floor just as Severus was coming up the corridor. "If you want to see Minerva you'll have to come back, Black."

"Who the hell do you think you are, telling me what to do, Snivellus?" Sirius snarled.

Lily wanted to slap both men. Luckily things were prevented from denigrating into an all-out shouting match by an auror who had come running up the corridor. "I have a message for you from your daughter, Professor Snape."

"Well, what is it? I haven't got all day." Severus was short with the auror after having to deal with Sirius.

"She said that Harry Lupin and Jamie Potter have gone missing, Professor. I've searched everyone and can't find them." The auror hurried to deliver the message.

Sirius felt Berus tighten around his neck. "What do you mean you can't find them?"

"We've searched everywhere." The auror, a tall burly man, felt intimidated by the look on Sirius' face.

"I've got to get home." Sirius turned to Snape.

"Scared are we?" Severus sneered.

"Screw you." With that parting rejoinder, Sirius sprinted back towards the infirmary. He knew that Poppy would let him use the fireplace.

On reaching the hospital ward, Sirius didn't bother explaining but headed straight towards the fireplace. Thinking that there was a hospital emergency, Poppy spoke the password and opened the fireplace for him. Sirius stepped into the fireplace before telling the nurse that he'd back shortly. Poppy left the fireplace open and, true to his word, Sirius arrived back within a few minutes, his wife right behind him.

Opening up a piece of parchment, Sirius spoke the words to activate it. "I solemnly swear that I am up to no good."

Lily watched in amazement. She'd heard about the map from James but this was the first time she'd ever seen it. "How did you get that back? I thought Dumbledore had taken it."

"He did. For some reason he sent it to Jamie at Christmas. Luckily I recognized it for what it was and took it off him." Sirius explained. "I was going to let him have it back at the start of his fourth year."

"He's never having it back." Lily declared.

Sirius looked down at the map. As he did so, he spotted Lockhart in the girls' bathroom on the second floor. "What the hell is he doing in there?"

Lily looked to see what Sirius was talking about. "Isn't that the bathroom where they found Harry's girlfriend?"

"I think it is. Come on." Sirius folded up the map and deactivated it, before turning and rushing out of the door, Lily close on his heels.

On reaching the second floor, Sirius ran into the bathroom only to find Gilderoy Lockhart about to leave the room. "Where are they Lockhart?"

Gilderoy didn't realize that Sirius didn't really know where the boys were, and that Sirius was just taking a stab in the dark. "The boys went into the Chamber. Potter wanted me to go in but I refused. Harry said to leave me, and they both went in."

"I don't care about you. Where are my sons?" Lily grabbed Gilderoy by the arms and shook him roughly.

"They went down the hole that opened at the sink. It closed behind them again." Gilderoy pointed to the row of sinks, and attempted to leave once more, only for Sirius to roughly grab him.

"You're not going anywhere except in there with us. What kind of a man leaves two schoolboys to go into the unknown on their own?" Sirius spat the words out.

"It was their choice. I only came with them because Potter begged me to." Gilderoy pointed out.

Lily ignored the altercation between Sirius and Lockhart and looked carefully over the area Lockhart had pointed out. Suddenly she spotted a tap etched with a small snake. Pointing her wand, she tried all the unlocking spells she knew.

Lockhart, who was still trapped in the bathroom by Sirius, interrupted Lily's concentration. "It only opened when Harry made a funny hissing sound at it."

Lily looked at Sirius who nodded. Suddenly a large black snake lay coiled in her place, making Lockhart rear backwards in alarm.

Sirius snorted in derision. "It's still Lily; she's hardly going to attack you."

Lily slid up the sink and looked at the snake etched tap. First of all she tried all the spells she could think of, and then she tried "open". To her relief the sink moved away to reveal a large hole. Transforming back into her human form, Lily turned to Sirius. "I'm going in there."

"Then so are we." Sirius nudged Lockhart with his wand and the blond haired man stumbled forward and tumbled head first into the opening.

"Sirius, was there any need to be so rough?" Lily looked a little exasperated.

"Yes, the man's a coward. He deserves everything he gets." Sirius loathed cowardice in any form as he had always believed himself to be an honorable man; someone who was always true to their word.

The pair of them jumped into the hole after Lockhart. Eventually they reached the bottom, dirty and a little bruised to find Lockhart cowering in the corner. Making their way through the cavern into a tunnel, they passed a snake skin which must have been over thirty feet long. At the end of the tunnel they found a wall surrounded by carvings of snakes. Here Lily once more transformed into Berus, hissed urgently, and the wall parted allowing the group access.

Lily reverted to her human form, and was in just to time to see the words "I Am Lord Voldemort" shimmer out of existence. Harry, holding his arm to his body, was standing facing a dark haired man. Off to the right, Lily could see Jamie lying across a prone Cho Chang.

Lily immediately ran in. "Get away from my children."

The dark haired man turned, and grabbed Harry placing a wand at his throat. "Don't come any closer."

The man looked up and met Sirius' eyes, causing him to gasp out loud. "Tom Riddle."

Tom looked interestedly at Sirius. "So, you know who I am."

Sirius nodded. "I recognized you from some photographs I had access to during my auror training."

Lily wondered why no-one was doing anything to help Jamie and Cho. Turning to Lockhart she pushed him in the direction of Jamie and Cho. "Look after them."

Lockhart made a half-hearted attempt to reach Jamie and Cho but ended up sitting in a heap, cowering on the floor several feet away from their bodies.

Sirius continued his conversation. "But you're dead."

"So I've heard. Miss Chang was most informative in her description of what happened to my counterpart." Tom looked across the room at the prone body of the girl. "She was an apt pupil; it's a shame she's about to die in order to give me life."

"How are you going to do that?" Lily interrupted the two men.

"I left an imprint of myself in a diary. First Draco Black, then Harry and finally Miss Chang, all wrote in it providing me with the necessary energy to return to life. I'd have kept on possessing Harry here, but he proved more than a little troublesome." At the word troublesome Tom dug the wand deeper into Harry's neck causing Harry to cry out in pain.

Lily wanted to rush Riddle but she knew that two words could end her son's life in a heartbeat, so she held her ground, waiting for the right moment. "Harry, you wrote in that thing?"

Harry nodded his head. "I'm sorry, I didn't know."

Sirius looked at the diary. "You've been sucking her dry through that?"

Tom nodded his head. "Yes, and now little time remains before the transition is complete."

“So what are you going to do after the transition is over?” Sirius couldn’t help himself; he was curious as to what Riddle was planning to do.

“Take up where my dead counterpart left off, of course.” Riddle pushed Harry towards a large statue as he spoke.

“You won’t get away with it.” Lily growled out.

“On the contrary, my dear, I think I will. I don’t intend to make the same mistakes my counterpart made.” Tom smiled mockingly at Lily.

“And how do you think you’re going to do that?” Lily slowly edged away from the madman holding her son.

Tom couldn’t resist boasting. “I’m going to round up his followers, and then I’m going to take over the Ministry. Finally, and most importantly, I’m going to ensure that I have an heir to rule beside me.”

“Who the hell is going to want to make an heir with you?” Lily asked in a disgusted voice.

“I’ve already made a most suitable choice. Miss Snape will make a lovely companion until she’s served her purpose.” Tom laughed out loud at Harry’s futile struggling. “Harry, Harry, don’t bother. You couldn’t beat me with your wand in your hand. You’re hardly going to do any better now.”

Ignoring Lily and Sirius, Tom turned to the statue, and spoke in parseltongue.

Taking advantage of the fact that Riddle was distracted, Lily changed into Berus, and slid away into the darkness. Hearing a faint noise, Tom swung round to find her gone.

“So, your lovely lady fled did she? No worries, I’ll still find her, and when I do, I’m going to take my time dealing with her.” Tom pulled Harry more firmly toward him.

“Leave my mother alone, you bastard.” Harry kicked Tom as hard as he could, earning him another sharp poke in the neck.

“So, she’s your mother. Even better.” Tom turned to finish his recitation, ignoring Harry’s renewed struggles.

Just as Tom finished speaking, Berus struck. Tom yelped and let go of Harry, who ran towards his brother.

Before Tom could curse her, Berus slid into the darkness once more. Sirius lunged forward and shot off a spell at the dark-haired man. Tom quickly dove behind a large stone at the back of the cavern where he uttered a spell to stay the effects of the snakebite Berus had given him.

Several feet away, Harry noticed the mouth of the statue opening. He could hear a slithering sound, and the same word being repeated over and over again, “kill, kill, kill.”

“Sirius, the basilisk is coming. Get Lily and get out of here.” Harry covered Jamie’s body with his own in a vain attempt to protect his brother. As he did so, phoenix song suddenly filled the cavern.

“Fawkes.” Harry looked pleased to see the bird, who flew over Harry’s head and dropped a small velvet pouch in front of him.

Tom laughed from behind the rock whose protection he had sought. “Hardly a prize.”

Harry picked up the pouch and a small dagger fell out. Lily immediately recognized it as one that Sirius had given her on the birth of their son as a mark of protection. Harry put the dagger in his hand and turned to face the opening where he knew the basilisk was going to enter the cavern from.

Lily’s voice rang out from the depths of the Chamber. “Harry, the dagger won’t defend you against a basilisk. Now don’t look at it if it comes out. I’m coming to help you.”

Harry watched as Berus slid across the cavern while Sirius provided cover by keeping Tom occupied. As soon as the snake reached Harry it transformed back into Lily, who put herself between her children and Tom.

A noise above their heads told them that Carus was finally about to make her entrance. Sirius, on seeing a tongue pop out of the opening, had immediately closed his eyes; Lockhart's had remained close for most of the altercation. Lily shielded Harry and Jamie with her body, making sure that she also didn't look.

Unexpectedly, the sound of screaming came from the basilisk as she was attacked by Fawkes. Tom screamed out in rage. "No you stupid bird, leave her alone."

Fawkes ignored Riddle and continued to gouge out the eyes of the large creature which thrashed around in pain. After completing his grisly task, Fawkes flew off into the depths of the Chamber.

Now fully out of the opening, Carus was blinded but not without her other senses. Flicking out her tongue she sensed movement coming from a short distance away to the left of her. Lifting her tail, Carus aimed it at where she heard the noise coming from. Lily looked up to see the tail heading towards her and Harry. Pushing Harry out of the way, Lily took the full brunt of the snake's wrath. From where he lay on the ground, Harry felt sick as he heard Lily smack into the Chamber wall, the noise of her bones snapping reverberating throughout the cavernous room.

Tom laughed. "My pet's saved me the trouble of dealing with her myself."

Sirius ignored Tom and started to run towards his wife, only to be prevented from reaching her by the angry basilisk. Not one to lose his head in a crisis, Sirius waited until the snake neared him. Sensing that her next victim had stopped moving, Carus opened her mouth to bite him. As she did so, Sirius calmly shot a Reducto spell into the soft tissue revealed to him by the snake. Seconds later everyone was covered by damp snake parts.

Tom growled in the back of his throat and started to purposely walk towards Harry. Panicking Harry picked up the diary that lay on the floor beside Cho and held the dagger over it. Tom stopped walking.

“Come any closer and I’m going to stab it.” Harry felt stupid holding the little dagger over the diary, threatening it.

“You really think that’s going to change anything? I’ve already made the transition. You can’t hurt me ” Tom bluffed.

Harry put a little distance between himself ,and his brother and Cho. He then placed the diary back on the floor, and knelt beside it. “Let’s see shall we.”

As Harry raised his arm, both Tom and Sirius screamed out “No.”

At their screams, Lockhart came out of his frightened stupor and saw what Harry was about to do. He didn’t know if anything would happen when the boy stabbed the diary but as Riddle and Black both appeared to be concerned, Lockhart realized that Harry could be about to place himself in the path of something watched as Harry brought the dagger down and pierced the diary. For a moment nothing happened, then the diary started to rustle and wobble.

For the first time in his life, Gilderoy put someone else’s safety before his own. For as much as Lockhart cared about his own wellbeing, he had become quite fond of Harry, who had defended him against his own friend, had become a diligent worker in his classroom, and hadn't tried to force him to come down into this ghastly hole. Not stopping to think about the danger of what he was doing, Gilderoy leapt forward, and threw himself on top of Harry just as the diary exploded in a flash of light and ink.

One week later

Harry awoke to find himself in a hospital bed. His parents were both sitting at his side. “Mum, what happened?”

Remus looked at Nia. “Do you remember anything about Saturday afternoon?”

Memories of what had happened in the Chamber came rushing back and Harry tried to sit up too quickly. "Ouch."

Gently Remus pushed Harry into his pillows. "Take it easy."

"Is everyone alright?" Harry asked anxiously.

Remus shook his head. "It's not good news I'm afraid. Jamie is still unconscious; we don't know what spell Riddle put on him. Craig has been battling to keep him alive."

Harry thought back to the battle that had taken place between Riddle and the two boys. "The spell was something like 'Flammare Penitus Somnus'. There was another word I think but I can't remember what it was."

Harry watched as Remus went white. "Are you sure Harry?"

Harry nodded. He'd been about to say something else to his Dad, when Remus shot out of the room.

Harry turned to his mother. "How long have I been in here?"

"Almost a week." Nia looked exhausted.

"Have you been here all that time? What about the girls?" Harry was concerned about his sisters.

Nia smiled softly at her son; she wasn't bothered about how long she had been there. She was just relieved that Harry had finally regained consciousness. For the first few days it had been touch and go as to whether Harry would survive or not, mostly due to the fact that his brain had swelled from the injuries he had sustained to his skull when he hit the cavern floor. Sirius had eventually placed him in a coma, only bringing him out of it the previous evening.

"Your Dad and I have been taking turns to sit with you. Sirius said that you would probably wake up today, so your Dad decided to stay as well. Grimstock is looking after the girls." Nia explained.

Remus strolled back into the room. "I conferred with Sirius about the spell. We think that it's one we've both come across before. We've just given Craig the details. We're hopeful that it hasn't been too long to save him."

Harry looked relieved. "Dad, what happened to Cho and Lockhart?"

Harry wanted to ask about Lily as well, but he suddenly found himself reluctant to ask about her. He replayed the moment her body had hit the wall in his mind; he couldn't believe that anyone could have survived an impact as brutal as that.

"Cho's stable but she's in a deep coma and the healers can't bring her out of it." Remus took a breath and continued. "Gilderoy, however, is critically ill. He took the brunt of the explosion from the diary."

"He saved me, didn't he?" Harry was shocked.

Remus nodded. "Yes, he did, Harry. The fact still remains though that he shouldn't have let you two go down there in the first place."

"Dad, I had to go. It was my fault Cho was down there." Harry defended Lockhart once more by placing the blame on himself.

"Harry, it's not your fault. I know all about the diary. Draco Black filled us in on it. There wasn't anything you could have done to fight it. I'd probably have succumbed just as easily as you did to its temptation." Remus and Sirius had talked in depth about the diary and its possible effects.

"I should have tried harder." Harry was trying not to cry.

"Harry, you did. Sirius mentioned that Tom said you'd resisted his possession. If you hadn't held out against him, it could have been you lying where Cho is now." Remus stroked his son's head, thankful that Harry had such a strong will.

"It should have been me." Harry was totally miserable now, and was still avoiding asking about Lily.

A noise startled the group. "Aren't you going to ask about Lily, Harry?" Sirius was leaning against the door.

"I don't want to." Harry admitted, looking down at his sheets. "I keep hearing her hit the wall in my head. I'm scared that she's not going to be okay."

Sirius had initially been annoyed when he'd heard Harry asking after Cho and Lockhart and not bothering to ask about Lily. Harry's confession that it had been fear that had caused him to avoid asking the question, almost undid Sirius, who cleared his throat and spoke in a matter of fact voice to hide his worry. "She's still critical. We think the combination of the snake hitting her and then her impacting the wall, broke over half the bones in her body. She's broken all of her ribs, both arms and both legs. Her most worrying injuries, however, are a fractured spine and skull."

Sirius looked grave and Harry couldn't help himself; he burst into tears.

Sirius beat Remus and Nia to get to Harry and pulled the heartbroken boy into his arms. "Shh, Harry. I'm going to do everything I can to make sure she pulls through. I'm going back there now. Do you want to see her? She might look a little scary though, as she's covered in bruises. Even magical healing isn't helping because of the severity of her injuries."

Harry lifted his head and nodded. "I don't care. I want to see her, please."

Remus silently watched as Sirius carefully lifted Harry out of his bed, and strode out of the room. He turned to Nia. "Do you want to come?"

Nia shook her head, her face white. "I want to go home to be with the girls."

Remus understood his wife's reluctance. She had still refused to meet with Lily despite discovering that Harry's abandonment hadn't

been deliberate. Remus knew she was afraid that Lily would say she wanted Harry back.

Nia felt sick. She'd refused to see Lily and now there was every chance that her sister might die. Realizing that this might be the last time to see her, Nia changed her mind and stopped Remus from leaving the room. "I'd like to see Lily please."

Remus slipped his arm around his wife's shaking shoulders. "I'll take you to her room."

They reached Lily's room to find Harry sitting on a chair holding Lily's hand and talking gently to her. Lily did indeed look as bad as Sirius had said she did, and it was all Nia could do not to cry out. Sirius was standing outside the room trying to give Harry a little privacy while still keeping an eye on his wife. The healer who had stayed with her while he went to speak to Harry had gone back to her duties.

"I'm so sorry. I should never have written in the diary. I should have told someone." Harry's voice broke on a sob. "Cho would never have gotten the diary if I'd done the right thing, and Jamie wouldn't have wanted to go down into the Chamber to get her."

Remus wasn't surprised to hear that it was Jamie who had pushed to enter the Chamber. Even though he knew that Harry was a brave child, Remus also knew that he was a sensible one. Remus turned his attention back to his son's dialogue.

"...just got to know you. I don't want you to leave me again." Harry's sobs were getting louder as he became more and more distressed.

Remus felt Nia stiffen at Harry's speech.

Softly he whispered to her. "Harry still loves you; he's just feeling guilty about Lily being injured." Remus, however, had a feeling that there was far more to it than that.

Nia relaxed slightly. Remus was right; Harry must be feeling dreadful about Lily's injuries.

Crying openly now, Harry was struggling to get his words out, and Sirius decided it was time to take Harry back to his room. Just as Sirius reached the foot of the bed, he heard Harry whisper to Lily. "I love you, Mamma, please don't go."

Sirius felt his breath catch in his throat. He knew that no-one was supposed to have heard the declaration except for his wife. "Harry, it's time to return to your room. Remus and Nia need some time with Lily now."

Harry looked small and pitiful as he held up his arms to Sirius who bent down to pick the boy up. Just as he did so, Lily started to convulse, blood pouring from her mouth.

Sirius immediately turned from Harry and screamed at Remus. "Get him out of here, now."

Remus rushed into the room and swept Harry into his arms as Sirius began to work on his wife. The sight of Lily fighting for her life sent Harry over the edge and he began to scream loudly. "No, please no. Don't leave me. Don't go."

Remus marched quickly out of the room, Harry struggling in his arms trying to get back to Lily. A healer who had seen the commotion quickly followed, stopping only to grab a sleeping potion, before following Remus into Harry's room.

Harry struggled against the healer as he tried to give Harry the potion. Remus stopped the healer. He then held Harry still with one arm and took the potion with the other. "Harry, please drink this."

Harry shook his head wildly, tears streaming down his face.

Remus decided to change tactics. "Harry Remus Lupin, you will open your mouth and swallow this potion right now, or you can forget about returning to Hogwarts ever again."

Shocked at his Dad's threat, Harry's mouth fell open and Remus tipped the vial of potion into it. Remus carefully took the sobbing boy

into his arms, and rocked him until he surrendered to the darkness. Remus then gently laid Harry onto the pillows and, looking around, he realized that Nia was nowhere to be seen.

Going back down the corridor, he found her sitting on the floor outside of Lily's room, sobbing into her hands. "Nia, come on, let me take you home. You can't do anything here."

Unlike Harry, Nia immediately turned into the comfort of her husband's arms, and let him lead her away from the room.

Next chapter: A funeral; Harry plunges into depression; Draco receives a visitor; and we learn more about Felidae.

I hope to post by next weekend; if everything goes well with end of term, it may be sooner.

Chapter 27: Aftermath

May 26th 1993

Draco lay in the hospital ward, looking up at the ceiling. He'd been unpetrified a few days earlier to find his mother standing over his bed. She'd explained what had happened in the Chamber and that Sirius needed to speak to him about the diary. Draco had agreed and had been taken to St. Mungo's because Sirius couldn't leave Lily. Once there, Draco had explained about Tom and the diary. After his interview with Sirius, Draco had returned to the school.

In the bed next to him, Pansy sat up. "Are you okay, Draco?"

"Yes, I was thinking about Harry." Draco turned to face Pansy, who was looking a little tired.

"Me too." Pansy blushed.

Draco wondered if he should tell her that Harry didn't feel like that about her, and decided it was one for his friend to handle. "I doubt we'll see him anytime soon. Mr. Lupin said he's going to be in St. Mungo's for a few more days at least."

"I'm sorry to hear about your aunt." Pansy smiled gently at her friend.

"Thanks. Mum's staying with my cousins." Draco hoped that Cassie and Orion were both doing okay. He honestly didn't care that much about Anna.

"Mr. Black" Minerva entered the hospital ward. "I have someone here who wishes to speak with you. Your mother has agreed to it, but only if you consent as well."

"Who wants to see me?" Draco asked.

A voice interrupted before Minerva could respond. "I do."

Draco immediately recognized the platinum haired man. "How can I help you, Sir?"

Lucius was pleased at Draco's manners, despite what must have been a shock at seeing him. "Professor, may I speak to Draco in private?"

Poppy, who by now had come to stand at the door of her office, turned to Minerva. "They can use my office."

Minerva waved her hand towards the office and watched as Draco wobbled his way across the room. Lucius followed him into the small office and shut the door.

"Please sit down, Draco." Lucius indicated a soft chair in front of the desk, as he moved to the rear of the desk and sat down there.

Draco thankfully sat down. "Thank you, Sir."

"You must be wondering what I wanted to speak to you about." Lucius looked at Draco's pale face.

Draco nodded, not bothering to verbally respond.

"I came to give you this." Lucius held out a key.

"This is a Gringott's key." Draco took the key, wondering why Lucius was giving him a vault key.

"I set up a vault for you on the day of your birth. I recently decided that, as you are about to turn 13, it was time for you to have access to it." Lucius betrayed little emotion as he spoke.

Noting Lucius' lack of emotion, Draco resorted to a formal form of address when talking about his Mum. "Mother never said anything about a vault."

"She wouldn't; she doesn't like me. She probably didn't want you to have any tainted Malfoy money." Lucius sneered at the thought of his ex-wife. However, he really didn't care what Narcissa thought about him any more; his main concern was what she told Draco about him.

"I don't know whether she likes you or not." Draco really didn't as his mother rarely mentioned Lucius. "However, she did tell me that you were a Death Eater and that you had disowned me."

Lucius rolled up his left sleeve to reveal a bare arm. "Do you see a brand here?"

Draco was hardly impressed. "Concealment spells, Sir."

Lucius got up and opened the door. "Professor McGonagall, could I be so bold as to ask for your assistance?"

Minerva walked into the room. "Yes, Mr. Malfoy?"

"I would like you to cast all the revealing spells you know upon my arm." Lucius held out his left arm.

Minerva hid her surprise at seeing it blank. Revealing spells were one of her specialties and she went through every spell in her arsenal before turning to face Draco. "He's got no concealment spells that I know of on him."

Draco watched his teacher leave the room and shut the door. "I don't know what to say, Sir."

"Draco, your mother left me and took you away because she heard a rumor that I was a Death Eater, and had been present at the Potters when they were attacked by the Dark Lord. I never willingly let you go. It was your mother who changed your name. In my anger at her, I disinherited you, but I never ever disowned you. Despite your name change, I still consider you to be my son." Lucius explained.

Draco felt a thrill deep down. His father still cared about him. Like any child who had been abandoned, Draco had had fantasies where Lucius had admitted that he still loved Draco and wanted to fulfill his role as a father.

"I would like to see you again, Draco." Lucius loved the children he had had with Petronella, but Draco was his first born. It had killed Lucius that until now, his ex-wife had refused to allow him access to

his son. Even then, it was only Petronella's begging as one mother to another, that had made Narcissa back down and allow him to visit Draco, and then, only if Draco acquiesced.

"I'd like that too, Sir." Draco smiled slightly.

"I think it's time we got you back to bed now." Lucius stood and moved around the table but didn't touch Draco.

Draco struggled to his feet. "Thank you for bothering to take the time to see me."

"It was no bother. I wanted to ensure that you safely got the key, and to check on your recovery." Lucius opened the door and watched Draco walk out.

Minerva made sure Draco was safely in bed, before turning to Lucius. "May I have a moment of your time?"

Lucius nodded his head, and turned to face his son and Pansy. "Draco, I will be in touch. Pansy, your sister sends her best wishes for your speedy recovery."

Turning on his heel, Lucius followed the deputy headmistress. He knew from her face that she wasn't inviting him to speak to her as a mere pleasantry.

On entering Dumbledore's old office, Minerva waited for Lucius to enter the room fully before she closed the door. "Mr. Malfoy, please take a seat."

"I'd prefer to stand." Lucius brushed an imaginary piece of lint off his shoulder, as he waited for McGonagall to come to the point.

"That was a nice show you put on there. I may not have been able to find a dark mark on your arm, but I'm almost certain that you somehow managed to slip the diary that caused all this trouble to Draco." Minerva didn't bother to wrap her accusation up in flowery words.

“I can assure you that I had absolutely nothing to do with the diary.” Lucius had heard about the diary from Narcissa, who had also accused him of having something to do with it.

“I find that very difficult to believe, Mr. Malfoy.” Minerva almost snorted in her contempt for the man in front of her.

Lucius immediately pulled out his wand, startling Minerva who imitated his actions and pulled out her own. “There’s no need to be alarmed, Professor. I’m not going to attack you.”

Minerva watched as Lucius swore on his magic and his life that he had had nothing to do with the diary at all.

Lucius felt the spell wash over him and dissipate. “Is there anything else you wished to see me about, Professor?”

“I must apologize, Mr. Malfoy. I judged you based on rumors and supposition.” Minerva held out her hand.

Lucius reluctantly shook hands with the teacher; it would have been bad form to refuse. “Thank you. I accept your apology. However, if you will excuse me, I need to return home now.”

“Perhaps you would care to floo from here?” Minerva made the gesture to make up for her rudeness.

“Thank you, I would.” Lucius waited as Minerva whispered the password and keyed Lucius into the fireplace. He knew, however, that the moment he stepped into the fireplace and disappeared, the password would be changed.

Minerva watched as Lucius disappeared and, as Lucius predicted, she changed her password immediately. She then sat down at the desk. She had to admit that she had been poleaxed at Lucius’ innocence in the matter of the diary, as well as the apparent lack of a dark mark on his left arm. She would have to speak to Filius about it.

Three days later

Filius entered Ravenclaw's common room, and approached Draco. "Draco, may I have a word with you?"

"What's wrong, Professor?" Draco stepped away from the table he was studying at and approached his teacher. Pansy followed him.

"It's Harry." Flitwick didn't get any further than that as Pansy cried out in distress.

"He's going to be okay isn't he?" Pansy's face was white as she gripped Draco's arm tightly.

"Miss Parkinson, please calm down. Harry will be fine. He just won't be returning to school this year. With everything that has happened, his parents have taken him home now that he's been released from St. Mungo's." Flitwick allayed Pansy's fears and he watched as the girl relaxed.

Draco was confused. "I'm sorry Professor, but I don't understand why you need to talk to me about Harry if he's going to be alright."

"It's his quidditch position. We have one game left this season. Even with your recent absence from practices, Roger Davies believes that you are our best hope." Flitwick explained.

"Roger wants me to play seeker?" Draco was stunned. "But I've only been practicing for chaser."

"Do you think you are up to the job?" Flitwick was determined to bring both the House Cup and Quidditch Cup within Ravenclaw's grasp.

"I'll do my best." Inside Draco was cheering loudly but he kept his facial expression benign as he faced his head of house.

"I know you will." With that Flitwick patted Draco on the shoulder and turned to leave.

Azkaban – 30th May 1993

The tiny rat pricked up its ears. Voices from quite a distance away reached the sensitive hearing of the rat in its cell. "I was planning to place one of my own people into the DADA position at Hogwarts, but Minerva McGonagall pre-empted me by employing one of her former students, a Remus Lupin, to teach this year.

The rat's ears pricked up even more at the mention of Remus' name. It listened closer. The sound of a sickly sweet female voice reached its ears. "But Minister, we need to know what is going on in that school."

"I know, Dolores, but we need to bide our time. There'll come a time when McGonagall, or Dumbledore, if he returns, can't fill a position, and then we'll be there to step in." The man's voice was determined.

"Oh you are so clever." The woman's sickly tone became simpering.

"It's nothing." The man sounded a little flustered by the woman's praise.

Realizing that the pair of them were coming closer, the rat changed into a skinny, watery-eyed, balding grey haired man, and sat down on what passed as his bed.

Cornelius Fudge indicated to the Aurors with him that they should open the door. He always dropped by to see Pettigrew on his routine visits to the prison; he still couldn't believe that the rodent-like man hadn't yet gone insane like the other prisoners.

"So Pettigrew, still with us I see?" Cornelius sounded jovial, as if he was talking to a good friend.

Peter just nodded. He watched as the toad-like woman who had accompanied Fudge whispered into the Minister's ear.

"Dolores here has just reminded me that perhaps we are being too lenient with you. She thinks that you should perhaps be moved to a more restrictive cell." Cornelius looked for a reaction from Pettigrew.

Peter kept his face blank. Inside he was shaking. It was bad enough here, in the cells kept for prisoners considered to be of a mid level danger. If he was moved, he would end up surrounded by Death Eaters such as the psychopathic Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband, to say nothing of an almost constant guard of Dementors, the feared custodians of Azkaban.

Disappointed that he hadn't been able to garner a response, Cornelius turned to Dolores who once more whispered in his ear. "Pettigrew, we'll be back. We're just off to check on the other accommodations in this section."

Dolores threw Peter a vindictive smile as she left his cell, and ordered the Aurors to close the door behind them.

As the cell door closed, a plan formed in Peter's mind.

Cornelius made his way up the corridor and finally reached the restricted section of Azkaban. On entering he looked round only to jump back hurriedly as a black haired woman threw herself at her cell door. "Come to play with me?"

Cornelius swallowed hard and said nothing. Despite the fact that this woman was kept permanently chained and locked up, he still felt very uncomfortable in her presence.

"I know a game. It's called 'How do you want to die?'. Shall we play?" The woman, Bellatrix Lestrange, cackled madly and waggled a finger at Fudge, who immediately stepped away in horror.

"I think it's time we left, Minister. I think these accommodations will do just fine for Pettigrew." Dolores was a firm believer in punishing those who had done wrong. If Pettigrew was still sane, then she felt that they were treating him far too kindly.

"Maybe you're right, Dolores. Let's see that Pettigrew is escorted here." Cornelius wiped his brow with his handkerchief, glad to be leaving the area where the madwoman was housed.

As he stepped out of the door dividing the sectioned area from the rest of the prison, Lestrangle called out once more. "I won't forget you two. Come back soon and play with me."

The pair speeded up their steps and hurried back to where they had left two Aurors standing outside of Pettigrew's room. Cornelius walked up to them. "Open the door."

The door swung open to reveal absolutely nothing. There was no longer anyone in the cell. "Where the hell is he?"

The Aurors dashed into the cell in the vain hope that Pettigrew might be hiding behind the door; there was no-one there.

McGrew, the senior Auror spoke up. "He was definitely in here. We haven't opened the door since you left, Minister."

"Well he can't have just disappeared into thin air. I want that man found." Cornelius picked up his briefcase and stomped towards the exit, Umbridge hurrying to keep up with him.

"Dolores, you were so right about the danger that man posed. As soon as Pettigrew is found, he'll be joining Lestrangle and her friends in the highest security area that Azkaban offers." Cornelius spat the words out; he couldn't afford to have a prisoner escape from somewhere that was supposedly impossible to break out of.

"I'm sure he'll be found. It's not as if he can get off the island." Dolores soothed.

Azkaban was a prison set on an island in the North Sea. The cell windows were exposed to the elements, with its inmates being provided little by way of comfort. Their one meal a day was a bowl of thick goop which, whilst being nutritious, tasted so bad, that many had problems in forcing it down until they were absolutely starving. The Ministry didn't believe in overfeeding its prisoners; they preferred to keep them weakened in order to add another impediment to the possibility of escape. The only way on and off the island was by boat. Portkeys and apparition were not allowed, not even for the Minister of

Magic. No-one so far had been known to have escaped from the prison.

"I hope you're right, Dolores." Fudge stepped onto the boat which was waiting for him. Before boarding, Fudge had first taken the precaution of ordering the Aurors to check the boat over just in case Pettigrew had managed to make it onboard.

"Well, we have the only boat that is allowed here, and Pettigrew is most definitely not aboard. I doubt very much whether he'll be able to hide from the guards for very long." Dolores shuddered at the thought of the Dementors. "We won't have to worry about his sanity when he's caught as I'm sure he won't be feeling very soulful for too long." Dolores tittered at her own pitiful joke.

Cornelius finally smiled. "Yes, yes. It's not as if anyone's going to miss him. I doubt he'll last very long after the guards find him." Putting the worry of Pettigrew out of his mind, Cornelius took that day's newspaper from out of the front of his briefcase and settled down to read until the boat reached a safe distance from the prison, and they could finally portkey back to the Ministry.

31st May 1993

'Killer Escapes Azkaban'

Cornelius threw his copy of the Prophet down in disgust. Just one day, and the escape was already headline news. He decided to set up an enquiry and to ask Dolores to head it up. He called to her and she rushed in, armed and ready to do Cornelius' bidding.

"Dolores, I have decided to promote you to Senior Undersecretary. Tell Ronson he's been demoted to Undersecretary. I need someone I can rely on at my side." Cornelius beamed at the woman in question.

"I won't let you down, Minister." Dolores took a seat and brushed off her pink skirt, before writing down her first task in her new position.

Darcy Cottage

Sitting up in bed, Harry imitated Fudge's action and threw his own copy of the paper to the ground. Harry looked down at the meal that sat on his lap. Having no appetite, he listlessly pushed it away and waited for his mother to come and collect the tray.

A knock signaled Nia's arrival. She looked at the tray in dismay. "Harry, you've got to eat something."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not hungry."

Scarlett-Rose appeared from behind her mother. "Harry, can I sit with you and read my book?"

Harry again shook his head. "Not right now." He then turned away and ignored his mother and sister.

Scarlett-Rose followed her mother out the room, her bottom lip trembling. "Mummy, why doesn't Harry want to read with me?"

Nia knew that Scarlett-Rose idolized her brother, and since returning home several days earlier, Harry had refused to eat anything or interact with anyone. Minerva McGonagall had agreed to let Nia keep Harry at home because it was only a few weeks until the end of term, and Minerva had cancelled all examinations after the basilisk incident. "Harry's still poorly, sweetie. We need to let him get better, and then he'll read with you."

Scarlett-Rose looked appeased. "Okay, Mummy. Can I read with you?"

Nia nodded her head and watched as her youngest daughter excitedly ran off to get her books.

3rd June 1993

Remus knocked on Harry's door. "Harry, it's time."

Getting no response, Remus pushed open the door to find Harry lying on his bed facing the wall. "Harry, it's time to go."

"I'm not going." Harry's response sounded mutinous.

Remus fully entered the room and shut the door behind him. "Harry, I know how hard this must be for you."

Harry turned and responded angrily. "How could you? Do you know what it's like to know that someone died because of something you did?"

Remus tamped down his anger. With the full moon being the next day, the wolf was now close to the surface; it wouldn't do for him to lose his temper with Harry. "Harry, I know exactly what's it like to lose someone because you think you made a mistake."

"I didn't make a mistake. I was stupid." Harry pouted.

"No Harry, you weren't. What I did was stupid. I lost one of my friends when I failed to follow orders during a mission in the first war." Remus hoped his admission would help convince Harry that he wasn't alone in his experience.

"That's totally different. I should have told someone. I should have tried much harder. Look at poor Cho. The healers don't know if she'll ever wake up, and it's all my fault." Harry spoke in a self-deprecating fashion.

"That's not true Harry. It's not your fault." Remus pleaded with Harry. "Please, Harry, put on your robes. The service begins in ten minutes."

Knowing that Remus was unlikely to leave him alone unless he did as he was asked, Harry begrudgingly got up and pulled on the black robes his mother had ironed for him.

Remus heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank you. We can apparate from here."

Harry dutifully took Remus' arm and the pair disappeared with a sharp crack.

Five minutes later the two of them were seated a few rows from the front of a white podium which dominated the area in which it sat. Spotting Harry, Dudley pushed his way to Harry's side and pulled him into a hug which Harry limply returned.

Dudley was worried; his brother looked terrible. "Harry, you are taking it easy, aren't you?"

Harry laughed bitterly. "As if Mum would let me do anything else. I'm fine Dudley."

With that, Dudley was brushed off. Anxiously he looked at Luna who just shook her head. Dudley backed off but remained at his brother's side.

Harry looked aimlessly at the ground, listening while the minister droned on and on about the deceased's wonderful character. Harry wanted to laugh; it wasn't as though the ministers who performed these sort of services usually ever knew the deceased that well. Finally the droning was over with, and Minerva McGonagall stepped up to the podium.

Clearing her throat, Minerva began. "As a friend and colleague, I would like to take this time to say a few words about Gilderoy..."

Harry switched off. Lockhart had been a joke, and he doubted very much that McGonagall had ever considered him to be a friend. It was just the sort of crap that people said at funerals to make the deceased look good. Eventually, however, all the speeches were over. Harry looked around. Most of the congregation was made up of witches, weeping into their handkerchiefs at the loss of their hero. More than one had apparently claimed to be his fiancé; something Harry found difficult to believe. Lockhart had been in love with only one person, and that had been himself.

Remus gently nudged Harry, and indicated that he should follow him to where the coffin lay. Thankfully, due to the injuries sustained by Lockhart, it had been decided to keep it closed. A large photo of Lockhart flicking his hair around had been placed on a stand behind the coffin. Many of the women wailed as they looked at it when

passing the coffin to pay their final respects. Harry stopped before the coffin and stared, before finally turning away and walking off. As he reached the edges of the crowd, he was confronted by Hermione and Draco.

"Hi Harry. I'm so glad you're okay." Hermione threw herself on Harry, who barely responded.

Draco, echoing Dudley's thoughts, mentioned how terrible Harry looked. "Harry, you look really awful."

"Thanks Draco." Harry's response was sarcastic. "Let's see how great you'd look if you were responsible for someone's death."

Hermione let out a shocked gasp. "Harry, Draco's just worried about you. And he's right, you do look awful."

"Well thank you both. But I'm just fine. I'll see you around." With that, Harry marched off to where Remus was talking to McGonagall.

Remus turned as Harry approached him. "Harry, I have some business I need to take care of with Professor McGonagall. Do you want to wait for me in the library?"

"Whatever." Harry stomped off towards the library.

Minerva was concerned. "Remus, he looks terrible."

"I know. Can we go to your office?" Remus didn't want anyone overhearing their conversation.

"Of course." Minerva turned towards the school and Remus quickly followed her.

On entering the headmistress' office, Minerva offered Remus a chair and a cup of tea.

Remus shook his head. "I'll take the seat but pass on the tea thanks."

"Would you care for something stronger?" Minerva asked.

"I wouldn't say no to a scotch or a firewhiskey." Remus' nerves were frayed at dealing with Harry and the upcoming full moon.

"I'm so glad you said that. I'm going to have a cognac myself." Minerva headed towards the drinks cabinet.

The pair raised their glasses, and out of politeness saluted Lockhart. Minerva then got down to business. "Remus, as you know, with Lockhart's death I am now without a candidate for the DADA teaching position. I was wondering whether you would consider taking it."

Remus was floored. He'd thought that Minerva had wanted to discuss the Alliance; she'd joined just after Christmas on Felidae's recommendation. The Alliance had been hoping to get a teacher from Hogwarts to join, and after Remus had discovered that Flitwick was not on Dumbledore's side when he'd helped with the kidnapping of Fawkes, he'd asked Felidae to sound Flitwick out. However, Felidae had said that Flitwick didn't want to have anything to do with joining the Alliance at that time, and Remus had let the matter of recruiting Flitwick drop. He had therefore been delighted when Felidae had explained what had happened to Minerva, and suggested that she might like to join instead.

"I thought you wanted to discuss the Alliance. I didn't expect to get a job offer. I don't know what to say, Minerva.." Remus responded.

"Say, yes. It would be nice to have another ally here." Minerva pointed out.

"Do you know about my problem?" Remus asked; he thought she probably did, as she had been teaching at the school when he had attended Hogwarts as a student.

Minerva shook her head. "What problem?"

Remus was surprised that Minerva didn't know. "I'm a werewolf. I thought Dumbledore would have told you."

“He didn’t. Do you consider yourself a danger to my students?” Minerva was fairly convinced that Remus would be okay. After all, he had children of his own and they were just fine.

“No, I don’t. I usually transform somewhere safe where no-one can get in and I can’t get out. I should tell you that Dumbledore allows me to use the Shrieking Shack to transform in. I can’t get out of it because the passageway is barred by the Whomping Willow.” Remus explained.

“If you believe that you will be of no danger to my students, then I don’t have a problem with your problem. You can still continue to use the Shrieking Shack if that is what you want.” Minerva allayed Remus’ main fear. “However, I am going to ask Severus to brew Wolfsbane, which should help you keep your mind during your transformation. I need your reassurance that you will agree to take it whilst you teach here.”

Remus pondered Minerva’s request for a few moments. Moving to Hogwarts would mean that he would be able to visit his family more often. The thought of Severus not trying to poison him was a little daunting but he knew that the position wouldn’t be his unless he agreed to Minerva’s terms. “I’m happy to take Wolfsbane if Severus is happy to brew it.”

The two of them then discussed living arrangements, schedules, Remus’ absences and salary before Minerva turned the conversation towards Harry. “Harry looks terrible. I take it he’s taking Lockhart’s death personally.”

Remus nodded. “I’ve done everything I can think of to try and chivvy him out of the doldrums he appears to have gotten himself into, short of shouting at him.”

“I think only time will heal him. I would hate to be in Harry’s shoes right now.” Minerva thought for a second, before continuing to speak. “Why don’t you reconsider keeping him at home? He might do better back here at school.”

Remus shook his head. "Nia won't hear of it. After what's happened, she wants him at home with her."

"Well, it was only an idea." Minerva thought that Nia was wrong but said nothing. "I think that's everything then. So I'll see you for the next Alliance meeting."

"You will. I doubt whether Sirius will be there though. Even though Lily still hasn't regained consciousness, they think she is going to be alright. Sirius, however, is still usually to be found at the hospital. Not counting Lily, I think things are more than a little stretched there at the moment." Remus informed Minerva.

"Oh, why's that?" Minerva enquired.

"Alice Longbottom is currently on a six month posting to Hungary. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Union many of the former countries have been lacking in healers. As you know, many were persecuted and expelled from the country, and Hungary, Romania, and East Germany have been sending their magical healers into the newly reformed countries to make up for the shortfall. This has meant that they've been lacking in their own hospitals. St. Mungo's was just one of the hospitals that agreed to send at least one healer to help out. It should have been Sirius' posting, but with Lily's accident, it was agreed that he should stay here." Remus explained.

"Who's going to be taking care of the children with Alice being gone?" Minerva asked.

"Their grandmother, but I've offered to take both Neville and his sister off her hands for the last month before school starts again." Remus thought that it might cheer Harry up.

"A good idea. I expect both children will be glad to spend time with you and your family." Minerva left unspoken the true reason; that the children would probably be very glad to escape their grandmother by then.

17th June 1993

Lily stirred and moaned softly. Her head hurt, and she tried to speak, only for an indiscernible croak to emerge.

Sirius stroked her hair. "Lily, wake up."

Lily opened her eyes and winced. Sirius immediately dimmed the lights and grabbed a glass of water. "Sip this."

Lily felt a hand gently lift her head, and the cold touch of glass against her lips. Carefully she took a small sip of water; it felt heavenly sliding down her parched throat. She then took a few more sips before the glass was removed.

"That's enough for the moment." Sirius pulled out his wand and cast various spells over his wife; satisfied he sat down at her side.

With her throat moistened by the water, Lily croaked out some words. "Where's James?"

Thinking she meant Jamie, Sirius told her that he was at home with the kids.

"Harry..." Lily coughed and Sirius immediately gave her a little more water.

Lily started again. "Harry and Jamie are okay?"

"They're both just fine." Sirius smiled and took Lily's hand.

Lily pulled her hand away. "What are you doing?"

"Trying to make you feel better." Sirius felt hurt at Lily's response.

"I want to see James." Lily demanded.

"I told you.." Sirius was interrupted by his wife.

"I know, you told me. He's at home with Harry and Jamie. Why can't he bring the boys here to see me?" Lily sounded almost whiny.

It was then that Sirius realized that Lily thought that James Potter was still alive. Luckily, Lily was now struggling to stay awake, saving Sirius from having to answer her question. Sirius watched as Lily's eyes closed and she fell back to sleep.

Sirius sat down heavily as Craig stuck his head in the door. "Lily still not awake yet?"

Sirius laughed bitterly. "She woke up a few moments asking for her husband. The only problem was that she asked for James and not me."

Craig walked up to his best friend and put a comforting hand on his shoulder. "It sounds as if she has retrograde amnesia. She'll probably remember things eventually."

"And what am I supposed to tell our children in the meantime?" Sirius shrugged Craig's hand off.

Craig didn't take Sirius' action personally. "The truth. That their mother's bump on the head means that she can't remember things, but that she loves them."

Sirius sighed. "Thanks Craig."

"Anytime." Craig looked at the red-headed woman lying in the bed. He felt sorry for Sirius, and knew that it could easily have been him sitting where Sirius was now. He called his personal ward house elf and told it to tell one of the other healers that if he was needed he'd be in Lily Black's room.

Several hours passed as the two men talked quietly together. Suddenly Lily moaned, making both men jump.

Sirius moved over to the bed, taking care not to touch Lily this time. "Lily, it's Sirius."

"Sirius, isn't James here yet?" Lily couldn't understand why her husband's best friend was at her bedside and not James. Sirius picked up the water and helped Lily sip out of the glass again. Lily

suddenly noticed his healer's uniform. "Sirius, it's not funny to take the uniforms, no matter what James encourages you to do."

"Lily, I am a healer." Sirius explained.

Lily looked a little closer at Sirius. It was only then that she realized how much older Sirius looked than he should have done. "What happened to me?"

"You were involved in an accident. You've been here for just over a month." Sirius spoke gently.

It became obvious that Lily didn't remember everything from waking a few hours earlier with her next comment. "Where are my children? Why aren't they here?"

"Both Jamie and Harry are fine. They're at home." Sirius knew he couldn't tell Lily that her oldest son was actually living with her sister.

"Can I see them?" Lily looked anxious.

"In a few days. You need to get a little stronger first." Sirius hedged.

"What about James? Why isn't he here?" Lily sounded panicked.

Craig nodded at Sirius, who took a deep breath. "I'm sorry Lily, but James is dead."

"I don't believe you." Lily refused to accept what Sirius was telling her.

"He's been dead for almost 12 years." Sirius watched as his wife struggled to maintain her composure.

Lily coughed harshly and gladly accepted the water Sirius offered once again. "What happened to him?"

"You-Know-Who killed him when he attacked you and your family." Sirius wanted to turn away as Lily's face finally crumpled as she gave way to her grief.

Craig approached the bed. "Lily, please drink this. It will help."

Numbly Lily did as Craig asked, and slowly slipped into a deep sleep. "That was a strong potion I just gave her. She'll sleep for at least 24 hours. It will give us some time to tell the children what's happened and to fetch Harry."

Sirius wanted to shake Lily awake and beg her to remember him, but as a healer he knew that it wouldn't work. Calling for his own elf, he instructed it to stay with Lily and that he would return shortly.

The next day

Dudley was glad to be home. Professor McGonagall had allowed him to return home a day early as he wasn't riding the Hogwarts Express and he really wanted to see Harry. Opening the front door, he was nearly knocked over by Scarlett-Rose hurtling into him.

"Hey, slow down." Dudley gently disentangled his little sister from his legs.

"Are you happy, Dudley?" Scarlett-Rose asked in a fervent tone.

"Of course I am, Scar." Dudley grinned down at the girl.

"Will you play with me?" The little girl sounded almost desperate.

"Once I've unpacked. Hasn't Harry been playing with you?" Dudley thought he already knew the answer.

Scarlett-Rose shook her head. "Mummy said he's still too poorly."

Nia came into the hallway to find her son home. "Dudley, its wonderful you could come back early. Did you bring the others with you?"

Dudley nodded. "Hermione is just dropping off her trunk at Luna's, and Draco was right behind me. Neville couldn't come. His Gran said he had to go home."

Dudley poked his head out of the door to see what was holding Draco up.

Draco was standing in the garden being questioned by his eldest sister, Aurilia. "Auri, leave him alone. He's here to see Harry, not you."

Aurilia pouted a little before flouncing off, finally allowing Draco to get into the house where he was met by Nia. "Mrs. Lupin, I'm very pleased to meet you. I'm Draco Black."

Nia shook his proffered hand, and asked him in. "Where's your trunk?"

"I can only stay overnight. Mum wants me home to help with the children." Draco explained.

Nia knew that Narcissa Delaney was looking after Lily's children whilst Lily remained in the hospital. "You can share Dudley's room for the night if that's okay."

Draco nodded. "Thank you. Can I see Harry please?"

At that moment both Hermione and Luna came bursting in the front door. "Hi Mrs. Lupin, where are your Screaming Sunflowers?"

Nia smiled at Luna; she really liked the slightly kooky blonde girl. "I had to ask your Uncle to take them out. They kept waking me up at night."

Luna shook her head. "They protect against vampires you know. You really should consider putting them back."

Nia wondered if Luna was joking. "I'll think about it, dear."

Hermione smiled and sedately held out her hand. "Mrs. Lupin, its nice to see you again."

"You too, Hermione. You know where Harry's room is if you want to go up." Nia hoped that Hermione and Draco could get Harry to come

out of his room. Nia and Remus had done everything including shouting at him, but to little avail. If his eating and mental health didn't improve soon, Nia was considering seeking professional help.

Draco followed Hermione up the staircase and to a wooden door with Harry's name on it. Hermione tapped gently. "Harry, can we come in?"

Harry's voice drifted out to them through the door. "I'm not feeling well. Go away."

Ignoring Harry's protest, Draco pushed past Hermione and opened the door to find his friend lying on his bed facing the wall.

Following Draco's lead, Hermione walked into the bedroom and up to Harry's bed. "Harry, please talk to us. We've really missed you at school."

"It's true Harry. It hasn't been the same without you." Draco wished that Harry would roll over and look at them.

"Draco has something for you." Hermione looked at Draco who obediently put his hand in his pocket and withdrew the golden snitch he had caught in the final match of the season, netting Ravenclaw not only the quidditch cup, but the house cup as well.

"Don't want anything." Harry sounded petulant.

"It's a golden snitch. Draco won it playing seeker in the final match against Hufflepuff." Hermione sounded proud of Draco's achievements.

"Well you've hardly missed me then. It seems as if Draco managed to step nicely into my shoes." Harry hissed; feeling betrayed that Draco had taken his spot on the Ravenclaw team.

"It was only temporary, Harry. I'm going to play Chaser next season." Draco tried to sooth his friend's worries.

"Sure you will. I'll get back and Davies will have put you in my spot and I'll be back to playing reserve." Harry almost snarled at Draco.

"Harry Remus Lupin, don't you think it's about time you stopped feeling sorry for yourself?" Hermione snapped, angry at Harry's response to Draco's gesture.

Draco cringed. He had a feeling that Hermione had just pressed the wrong buttons. His suspicions were confirmed when Harry whipped round and got up from where he was lying.

"I'm not feeling sorry for myself. What do you know about it anyway?" Harry sounded angrier than Draco had ever heard before.

"Harry, we understand that what happened with Lockhart is difficult for you." Hermione began, only to be interrupted by Harry.

"You two don't understand anything. You have no idea what I went through; what I'm going through now." Harry sat down on his bed.

Draco felt a little annoyed at Harry's outburst. "You're not the only one who went through something because of that diary."

"That might be so, but I'm the one who was responsible for what happened to Cho and my mother. I'm also responsible for one man's death and for my brother suffering an horrific curse." In his anger, Harry didn't notice that he'd called Lily his mother. "Please just get out and don't come back."

Hermione looked at Draco and the two of them headed for the door. Hermione turned to look at Harry. "We're still your friends, Harry."

Harry watched as the door closed behind the two of them, and he angrily threw his pillow at it.

Nia was waiting expectantly in the kitchen for Hermione and Draco. She knew from their faces that they hadn't been successful. "I take it things didn't go well."

Hermione shook her head. "He's so angry."

Luna stood up. "I'm going to talk to him."

Everyone watched as Luna, humming a little tune, skipped merrily up the staircase and out of sight.

"She won't get anywhere." Draco was feeling a little despondent that he hadn't managed to help Harry.

"You don't know that. Luna is one of the most caring people I know." Dudley defended his young girlfriend.

"Just because she's caring, doesn't mean that Harry is going to listen to her." Hermione took Draco's side.

"We'll see." Dudley looked smug. He and Luna had talked a lot about Harry. She'd also told him about her parents, and how it felt to lose someone. He knew if anyone could get through to his brother, it would be Luna.

Upstairs Luna tapped gently on Harry's door. "Harry, may I come in?"

"Why not, everyone else has." Harry retorted.

Luna stepped gracefully into the room. "Thank you Harry."

She then sat down on Harry's bed and said nothing.

After ten minutes of Luna just sitting there, Harry finally cracked. "Well, aren't you going to tell me that I'm selfish and need to snap out of it?"

Luna shook her head. "No, I just want to sit with you."

Harry sat down next to Luna, and the two of them just sat quietly until eventually Harry spoke. "I didn't like Lockhart but I didn't want him to die. I even told him he didn't have to come down into the Chamber. Why did he do it? I know he was scared to go down there."

"I don't know Harry." Luna didn't try to answer Harry's question.

Neither of the children knew that Sirius had forced Lockhart into going. Remus had just assumed that Harry knew and therefore hadn't mentioned it to his son, preferring to avoid the topic of Lockhart altogether once the funeral had been held.

"It's not fair. Why did he have to die?" Harry's voice cracked a little.

"I'm glad he did. Otherwise you wouldn't be here now." Luna didn't bother to sugarcoat her response.

"How can you say that you are glad someone died?" Harry felt a little aghast at Luna's honesty.

Luna started to braid her hair as she spoke. "Because I care far more about you than I do about Lockhart. Your death would have hurt not only me, but your family and friends as well. His death is only important to a bunch of sad old witches who wanted nothing more than to get into his bed."

Harry fell silent again and watched the girl continue to braid her hair until she had completely finished. She then turned to Harry. "I can braid your hair too if you want."

Harry had regrown his hair out after Narcissa's wedding. "I don't think it would look as nice on me as it does on you."

Luna smiled happily at Harry's compliment. "Do you know, I always thought that we were meant to be together?"

"Is that why you asked me out?" Harry asked.

Luna shook her head. "No, I asked you out because I really liked you. But I'm happy with Dudley. He makes me smile and he doesn't laugh at me when I tell him stories about my parents."

"Why would he laugh at you?" Harry was bewildered.

"Because Daddy used to go on searches for creatures that no-one else believed existed. I've got all the copies of the Quibbler that he

ever printed, and I believe in him even though he's gone. Most people I tell just laugh at me." Luna explained.

"I think that it's nice that you have such a good memory of him." Harry smiled gently at Luna.

"It's only what Uncle Grimstock told me. I don't really remember him." Luna told Harry. She then switched the conversation away from her and back onto the subject of their departed teacher. "I think its best just to remember the good things about people, even Lockhart."

"I don't have anything good about to remember about Lockhart. The man was an idiot, he couldn't teach, he was a lousy dueler, and his books were rubbish." Harry pointed out.

Luna thought hard. "Perhaps you would like to remember him having silver and green hair."

Harry laughed at the memory, and Luna smiled at him. "See there is something good to remember about him. I told you it's easy once you think about it."

Harry sobered up, thinking about Luna's loss and not his own. "You must remember something good about your parents."

"Harry, I was only six when they died. I don't remember them that well. I told you that when I first met you." Luna reminded Harry of the first conversation that they had ever had.

"I know what you said, but I still don't believe that you don't remember anything at all. There must be something special you remember." Harry argued.

Luna looked thoughtful. "Well, I do remember that Mummy used to sneak downstairs in the middle of the night. Sometimes she'd let me go downstairs with her and drink her special hot chocolate."

Harry was interested in what Luna was telling him and encouraged her to tell him more. "What about your Dad? I know he liked unusual creatures and ran the Quibbler, what else?"

“Daddy used to call me his little Crumple-horned Snorkack and he liked to carry me around on his shoulders.” Luna smiled at the memory.

“So you do remember them.” Harry exclaimed.

Luna nodded her head. “I do but it’s easier not to tell anyone. I hate it when people start feeling sorry for me.”

Harry noticed that Luna’s voice had cracked slightly when she spoke. “If you ever want to talk about them, I’ll listen, and I promise not to feel sorry for you.”

Luna let a few tears slip from beneath her lashes and hugged Harry. “Thank you Harry. I can offer you the same. I’ll listen and not feel sorry for you.”

Harry was fed up with fighting himself. “I don’t know what to do or to feel, Luna. One minute I’m glad that I’m not dead, and the next I feel that I should be the one whose funeral everyone went to.”

“Uncle Grimstock just used to let me sit on his knee and talk about Mummy and Daddy. You’re a bit too big to sit on my knee, but why don’t I hug you and we can talk about your mother?” Luna pulled Harry into her arms as she spoke.

Harry didn’t fight her and relaxed. He had a feeling that Luna was talking about Lily and not Nia when she mentioned his mother. “I don’t know how I feel about her. I think...” Harry fell silent.

“What do you think?” Luna gently urged Harry to continue.

“I think I care about her more than I ever thought I would. When I saw her lying in the hospital bed I thought I was going to lose her. I had to be dragged away from her bedside kicking and screaming when she suddenly started to have a fit.” Harry admitted.

“Harry, you can love your mum and Lily. You don’t have to choose.” Luna pointed out.

Harry sighed. "I know; I just feel guilty about Mum if I get close to Lily."

Luna stroked Harry's head, and not having a solution to Harry's problem, changed the subject. "How do you feel about Jamie?"

This subject was far easier for Harry to deal with. "I'm starting to get along with him, but I know I don't love him. I'm still finding it hard to trust him. I haven't seen him since I got out of hospital. I'm scared he's going to blame me for what happened to Lily and Cho."

"Do you think it's your fault?" Luna asked.

Harry nodded. "I should have told someone about the diary and Tom."

"Then why didn't you?" Luna asked what no-one else had thought to.

"Because I was afraid of someone taking the diary away from me." Harry confessed.

"Harry, Draco feels exactly the same as you do. He wanted to tell someone about the diary but was scared to do so, even after he'd thrown it on the fire." Luna told Harry.

Harry thought about Draco. He'd accused Draco of not understanding, when he was probably the one person who did. "I was unfair to him."

Luna nodded her head. "Yes, you were. But Draco won't care. He just wants his friend back."

"I think I'd better apologize to him and to Hermione. I was really horrid to them both." Harry pulled free from Luna's grip.

Luna got up from the bed and brushed off her skirt. "I'm going back down now. I'll send Draco and Hermione up."

Harry had no chance to respond to Luna's declaration as she shot out of his room. He knew, however, that his friends deserved some sort of apology.

Harry waited nervously for his friends to arrive. Hearing a knock, Harry yelled that they should come in, and watched as just Draco came in. He wondered if Hermione, despite her declaration of still being his friend, didn't want to see him. Seeing Draco waiting, Harry hurried to get his apology out. "I'm so sorry, Draco. I've been such a git that I didn't stop to think that you probably felt as bad as I did about someone else getting the diary."

Draco was glad that Harry was talking to him again. "It's okay Harry; you don't need to apologize."

"I really am sorry." Harry looked at the floor.

"Harry, it really is okay. There's something you need to remember though." Draco sounded like his Dad when he was lecturing Harry on something he'd done wrong.

"What's that?" Harry wondered what Draco was going on about.

"That it was Tom Riddle's fault what happened and not ours. We're just kids, Harry. We couldn't have done anything against him." Draco didn't expect Harry to accept what he was saying straight away. It had taken him almost a month to believe what his Uncle Sirius had told him.

"But Tom was only what, 16 or 17? We should have been able to deal with someone of that age." Harry argued.

"Maybe, maybe not. Look at who Riddle turned into Harry. Uncle Sirius said that he was probably already quite powerful, even at that age." Draco pointed out.

On an intellectual level Harry knew that what Draco was saying was right, but emotionally he knew that he would have a hard time convincing himself it was true. "I think I just want to try and forget about it for a while."

Draco hugged his friend, and turned to leave, only to be stopped by Harry. "I'm sorry I missed your birthday, Draco."

"It's okay Harry. You can make it up to me at Christmas." Draco grinned as he walked out of the door, and Hermione came in. "I'm sorry, Harry. I shouldn't have shouted at you."

"Yes you should. I was feeling sorry for myself." Harry reached forward and drew Hermione into the space Draco had just vacated, thankful that she was still speaking to him.

"I'm just glad that you're feeling better again." Hermione still thought that Harry looked awful though.

Harry's next question surprised Hermione, as it was totally out of the blue. "Hermione, why didn't you come and see me when I was in the hospital?"

"I did. But after the first visit I was so upset, Papa refused to let me visit you again." Hermione admitted.

Harry felt warm inside at Hermione's statement. "Oh. I'm sorry you were upset."

"It's okay, Harry; you were worse than I was!" Hermione thought Harry sweet to be concerned about her. "Anyway, Papa visited you several times."

"Really?" Harry was surprised.

"Yes, I had to know how you were doing." Hermione blushed.

Harry didn't know what to say; he just knew that suddenly he felt as if he could fly like Superman. "Thanks, Hermione."

Silence fell before Hermione pulled away from Harry's embrace. "Why don't I get your Dad to order some pizza in and we can all sit outside in the garden?" Hermione hoped she wasn't pushing Harry

too hard to join everyone downstairs, but she really needed to get out of his bedroom.

“That sounds great.” The thought of food was suddenly appealing to Harry for the first time in weeks. “Let’s go.”

Hermione held up her hand to stop Harry. “Err, Harry, not so fast.”

“What’s wrong?” Harry suddenly felt concerned.

“I think you should take a shower first.” Hermione grinned as she dashed out of her friend’s bedroom.

Harry sniffed and realized that his friend was right. After finishing his shower, Harry headed downstairs where he was soon enveloped by his shaking mother. “Oh, Harry, I’m so pleased to see you up.”

It was at this moment that Harry truly realized how upsetting his behavior must have been to his parents. This was brought home even more when Scarlett-Rose nervously sidled up to him and tugged on his sleeve.

“Harry, are you better now?” Scarlett-Rose looked anxious as she asked the question.

Harry struggled to pick his little sister, highlighting how weak he had become since the accident. “What do you think?”

Scarlett-Rose grinned. “I think yes.”

Harry quickly put her down before he dropped her, and turned to Remus. However, before they could engage in conversation the fireplace flared up, and Sirius stepped out.

Harry immediately shot forward. “Is Lily okay?”

“Calm down.” Sirius put a comforting hand on Harry’s shoulder. He then turned to Remus. “Can I use your study to speak to Harry in private?”

“Sure.” Remus waved his hand in the direction of the room.

Sirius drew Harry to his side and walked with him into the study. Once there, Sirius knelt down on one knee in front of Harry.

“Harry...” but Sirius didn’t get much further as Harry butted in.

“Something’s wrong with Lily isn’t there? You wouldn’t be here otherwise.” Harry hoped that he was wrong in his reasoning.

“Lily should make a full recovery. She woke up for the first time yesterday...” Again Sirius didn’t get any further with his speech as Harry burst into relieved tears.

“Harry, she’s going to be fine.” Sirius smiled and patted Harry’s arm.

“I thought she was going to die, and it would have been all my fault.” Harry sobbed.

Sirius steered Harry into a seat and resumed his kneeling position. “Harry, it’s not your fault. Do you have any idea what you were actually dealing with?”

Harry was confused. “What do you mean?”

“I mean the diary. Do you know what it was?”

Harry shook his head. “I thought it was just something that had Tom’s memories in.”

“It wasn’t just memories in the diary. That is why it was so difficult to resist it.” Sirius stood up, his knee beginning to ache. Leaning against the desk, Sirius continued. “Your Dad and I believe that it was something called a horcrux.”

“What’s a horcrux?” Harry had never heard of one before.

“A horcrux is something that is created by murdering someone. In the process, a portion of the murderer’s soul is deposited into a vessel; in

this case the murderer was Riddle and the vessel was the diary.” Sirius explained.

“But who did Riddle murder?” Harry asked.

“I thought you might have guessed.” Sirius was surprised that Harry hadn’t. “We think it was Myrtle Seaton.”

“Moaning Myrtle! Of course, he used the basilisk to kill her, didn’t he?” Harry finally put the pieces together.

Harry then had a horrific thought. “Does that mean I was talking to You-Know-Who himself when I was writing in the diary?”

Sirius shook his head. “Not exactly. The diary contained just a part of You-Know-Who’s soul, not him as a person.”

“Does that mean he’s dead now because I stabbed the diary?” Harry asked hopefully.

“No. He’s still out there somewhere. The diary is the reason we believe he didn’t die when he attacked you and your family when you were a baby. Part of his soul was hidden in the diary anchoring him to this existence.” Sirius explained.

“I was hoping he was dead.” Harry sounded a little mournful.

Sirius looked thoughtful as he spoke. “No, he’s still floating around, probably looking for a way to get back. You just destroyed the part of his soul that lived in the diary; not the part of him that possessed your teacher.”

“Perhaps he might never come back.” Harry knew it was wishful thinking however.

“I really don’t know whether he will or not.” Sirius’s face then became completely serious. “Harry, there’s something I need to ask you.”

“What is it?” Harry hoped it was nothing bad.

"I need you to come to the hospital tonight and see Lily. Will you?" It was Sirius' turn to look hopeful.

"Of course I'll go. I'll just tell Mum and Dad." Harry got up.

"Slow down, Harry. I haven't finished yet." Sirius watched as Harry impatiently sat back down. "Lily's got amnesia. She can't remember anything since before You-Know-Who attacked you when you were a baby, and she doesn't even remember the attack."

Harry gasped. "So she doesn't know that she's married to you then? Oh no. She also doesn't remember Cassie and the others does she?"

Sirius shook his head; Harry had been far more perceptive than his brother. Jamie had only thought about how it affected him, and hadn't bothered to think about how it might affect his siblings and Sirius. "No she doesn't. She also doesn't know that you live with Remus and Nia."

Harry stood up. "Don't worry, Sirius, I won't say anything about it to her. I'll just pretend that me and Jamie are staying with you while she's in hospital."

"Thanks Harry." Sirius led Harry out of the door to find everyone watching them.

"I need to go to the hospital to see Lily. She's asking to see me." Harry told everyone.

Nia's knees gave way in relief. "So she's going to be alright?"

As much as Sirius disliked Nia, he saw how white she had gone and took pity on her. "She's going to be just fine Nia. I'll let you know when she's up to more visitors."

Nia's voice shook a little. "Thank you."

"Harry will be back in the morning if that's okay. I'm not sure what time we'll get out of the hospital." Sirius turned to Draco. "Draco, your mother said you can stay for a week if it's okay with Remus and Nia."

Draco's face lit up with joy as Remus nodded his assent. "Of course he can stay."

Harry hugged Nia and Remus apologizing to them for his behavior as he did so. Both of them brushed off his apologies. They were both aware, however, that despite Luna's breakthrough with Harry, it was still likely that it would take some time for him to get over what he had been through. Both of them had taken turns since Harry had returned from the hospital in comforting him at night. Ever since he had first awoken in the hospital his nightmares had been terrible, worsening even more as more time had passed. They both hoped that the nightmares would begin to lessen now that he appeared to be in better spirits.

Harry stepped into the fireplace with Sirius as they were heading to Black Manor, and not Grimmauld Place, and Harry wasn't keyed into the wards. Harry shut his eyes as the world whirled around him, and the next thing he knew he felt himself pitch forward, only to be stopped by Sirius' firm grip.

Sirius smiled. "Not so keen on floo travel?"

Harry's response was quite vehement. "I absolutely hate it!"

Harry then took a moment to look around. Black Manor was extremely opulent and beautifully decorated. In comparison, Grimmauld Place had had more of a lived-in feel; it was somewhere you could call home. In Black Manor, Harry felt like an intruder.

"Hello Harry." Narcissa swept graciously into the foyer, and held out her hand to Harry.

"Mrs. Delaney, it's nice to see you again." Harry felt a little shy at meeting Narcissa without Draco.

"The children are in the sitting room." Narcissa informed Sirius. "Are you taking all of them to the hospital or just Jamie?"

“Just Jamie. I don’t want to bombard Lily with too much information all at once.” Sirius explained. “It’s bad enough that she doesn’t remember being married to me.”

“Craig told me. I’m sorry Sirius.” Narcissa realized that she would be unable to visit her friend now that she was awake until Sirius had explained their relationship to her.

“It’s okay, Narcy. Craig thinks that we should leave it for a few more days before we tell her about being married to me, if she doesn’t remember naturally.” Sirius had the feeling that he would have to tell her; he couldn’t see her remembering by then.

Jamie stood up as Sirius walked into the sitting room. “Dad, you’re back. Can we go to the hospital now?”

Sirius ignored Jamie’s question, and turned to the three children who were sitting quietly. “You know that I’m only taking Jamie to the hospital don’t you?”

All three nodded, so Sirius continued. “Did Jamie and Aunt Narcissa tell you about Mummy?” Again the three children nodded.

Cassie got up and hugged her father’s leg, her face blotchy from crying. “Why can’t I see Mummy now?”

Sirius wasn’t surprised that Cassie hadn’t really understood the concept of amnesia. “Mummy can only have a few visitors at a time; you’ll get to see her in a few days’ time.”

Cassie seemed mollified at that, and held up her arms for Sirius to pick her up. Once she was nestled on Sirius’ hip, Cassie buried her face in his shoulder, feeling better now that her Dad was there. Having checked that the three younger children were aware of what was going on, Sirius turned to Jamie. “Jamie, we’re going to go in a little while.”

Anna suddenly spied Harry. “What’s he doing here?”

Jamie turned to see who Anna meant and saw Harry standing in the doorway. Aware that his Dad was watching him, Jamie was polite to his brother. "Harry, it's nice to see you."

Harry immediately read between the lines, and realized that Jamie was more than a little pissed at him. "Jamie, it's nice to see you as well."

Cassie struggled to get down from Sirius' arms and together with Orion, the two of them dashed to hug their half-sibling. "Harry, Daddy said you were really poorly. Are you all better now?"

Harry smiled down at Cassie, who had easily found a place in his heart. "I'm just fine now, Cassie."

"Did you win your last match?" Orion asked excitedly.

Harry shook his head. "I was too sick to play. Draco played instead and he caught the snitch. He offered it to me; I'm sure he'll give it to you instead if I ask him to."

Seeing Orion's excited face, Harry made a note that if Draco wanted to keep the snitch after all, he would ask Remus to take enough money from his vault to buy a replacement snitch for Orion.

Anna watched the interaction and said nothing. Jamie had told her exactly what had happened at school, and had explained that it was Harry's fault that both their mother and Jamie's girlfriend were both now laying in hospital.

Sirius gently disentangled Cassie and Orion from Harry. "Harry and Jamie both need to come along with me now."

Finally, Anna spoke up. "Why does he get to see Mum and we don't? It's his fault that she's in there in the first place."

Sirius mentally swore at Jamie, and turned to Anna. "It's not Harry's fault at all. Your Mum and I made the decision to go into the Chamber together to get both Harry and Jamie out."

“But he had that diary; it’s his fault.” Anna protested.

“Your cousin had it first. Is it Draco’s fault too?” Sirius snapped.

“Yes. I hate Draco as well.” With that Anna stomped off.

Harry felt upset at Anna’s accusations, despite his dislike of her. He could also see that Orion and Cassie had both been upset by the shouting. Harry was therefore surprised when Orion shot forward and grabbed Harry around the waist in a hug. “I don’t blame you Harry. Aunt Nancy said it wasn’t your fault. Anna’s a meanie.”

Cassie followed her brother’s lead and once more hugged Harry, whispering quietly to him. “I love you. You’re nice to me and Anna’s horrible.”

Cassie’s response to Anna’s attack made Harry wonder exactly how awful Anna actually was to her siblings. He understood Anna’s animosity towards him but he couldn’t see how anyone could be nasty to Cassie or Orion.

“I still blame you.” Jamie spoke softly, not meaning for Sirius to hear him.

Jamie, however, had reckoned without Sirius’ excellent hearing. “Jamie Potter, you will apologize to Harry at once.”

Harry looked calm as he spoke. “It’s okay Sirius. Jamie has every right to be angry at me but I think that he’s forgetting something.”

“Oh, and what would that be?” Jamie snarled at his brother, not bothering to lower his voice this time.

“That it’s your fault we ended up without our wands in the Chamber.” Harry kept the censure he was feeling out of his voice.

“Jamie, is this true?” Sirius asked.

Jamie wanted to lie but somehow his Dad always knew when he was being untruthful. “Yes, Sir.”

“Cassie, Orion. Please go to your rooms. I need to talk to Harry and Jamie alone.” Sirius smiled at his two youngest children to let them know that they weren’t in any trouble, as they both looked worried.

As soon as the two children had left the room, Sirius turned on Jamie. “So you caused the loss of both your and Harry’s wands in the Chamber, and you have the audacity to try to lay the blame for the whole fiasco solely on Harry.”

Jamie swallowed, and nodded. “But...”

“No buts. I don’t want to hear it.” Sirius snapped at Jamie before turning to Harry and calmly asking for explanation. “I would like to know the truth about what happened down in that Chamber before I arrived, Harry.”

Even though Sirius looked totally calm, something about the way his face was absolutely still, made a small frisson of fear run down Harry’s spine. He quickly started to tell Sirius what had happened. “When we entered the Chamber, we saw a man, who I recognized as Tom, standing over Cho. Jamie ran forward and dropped his wand when he was trying to pick Cho up.” Harry omitted the fact that Jamie had ignored a warning Harry had yelled to him.

“What have I always taught you?” Sirius turned his attention back to Jamie.

“Never to lose sight of my wand.” Jamie had had the mantra drilled into him ever since he got his first wand.

“Harry, please continue.” Sirius demanded.

“Tom picked up Jamie’s wand, and used that Flammare spell on him. I tried to disarm Tom, but he used a curse on me as well; I think it was the Osfracto curse. Anyway, it broke my arm and I dropped my wand.” Harry could still remember the pain as the bones in his lower arm had felt as if they were exploding. “Tom then picked up my wand as well.”

"I wonder why Riddle didn't curse you in the same manner as he did Jamie." Sirius mused.

"Because he wanted me to join him. He said I could have the honor of being his first follower." Harry had been surprised at Riddle's request.

"But why ask you to join him and not Jamie? Jamie is the Boy Who Lived." Sirius pointed out.

"Tom didn't say. He just said that I was powerful and could go far under his guidance." Harry explained. "I asked him why I would ever want to follow someone who lived in a diary. Tom then spelt out his name in flaming letters, 'Tom Marvolo Riddle' and rearranged them until they spelt 'I Am Lord Voldemort'. I had just refused when you, Lily and Lockhart arrived."

"Thank you, Harry." Sirius realized that Lily might not have been hurt so badly if Jamie had kept hold of his wand, and turned angrily to face him. "Jamie, putting the blame on someone else when you know it isn't true is cowardly, and you know how I feel about cowardice."

"Yes, Sir." Jamie didn't bother protesting. He knew that Sirius would be punishing him either way.

"You will receive no privileges for the next month; that means no television, trips or visits from your friends. You will also keep clean your own bedroom. I will instruct Mellie that she is not to help you in any way for the next month. You will also tell Anna the truth about what happened. I'm fed up with you poisoning her against Harry. Finally, should you disobey any of these rules or should I find you misbehaving during the month's punishment, I will extend it to two months. Do I make myself clear?" Sirius would have made the punishment last until Jamie returned to school; the only reason he hadn't was because he knew how much Jamie had suffered from the curse Riddle had inflicted on him.

Jamie was relieved to have gotten off as lightly as he had. Thankfully Ron was coming to stay for the last two weeks of the summer holidays, and not before. "Yes, Sir."

Harry respectfully remained silent until Sirius had finished chastising Jamie. As a silence fell over the room, Harry broke it with a question for Sirius. "Sirius, do you know why Lockhart went into the Chamber? I know he really didn't want to go down there."

"Didn't Remus tell you?" Sirius was surprised his friend had failed to inform Harry.

"No, he didn't. Dad just told me that you and Lily managed to discover the entrance and had made your way down to find Jamie and myself. " Harry informed him.

"I forced Lockhart into the tunnel leading to the Chamber. I was angry with him for letting two young children venture in there alone." Sirius admitted.

"So it wasn't my fault that he was there." Harry spoke to himself. As the realization finally sank in that he had played no part in Lockhart's being in the Chamber, Harry's legs suddenly gave out on him and he began to shake uncontrollably.

Sirius caught Harry before he could hit the floor. "Oh Merlin. You actually thought it was your fault he died! When Remus said that you had had a bad time after the Chamber, I just assumed that it was because of Lily. I never dreamt it was because you felt guilty about Lockhart."

Harry struggled to hold back his tears and failed. Sirius held on to him as he sobbed uncontrollably. Sirius looked at Jamie and indicated that he should leave the room. Jamie left, feeling a little shocked at Harry's distress; he hadn't realized that Harry had taken everything that had happened to heart.

"Harry, I'm so, so sorry. I really thought Remus had told you that I'd made Lockhart go with us." Sirius stroked Harry's hair as he rocked him. Pulling him closer and on to his lap on the floor, Sirius was horrified at how bony Harry actually was.

Feeling a little embarrassed, Harry struggled to get a hold of his emotions, his sobs lessening.

Sirius felt bad for what he had caused Harry to go through. "It's all my fault. I should have checked, and not just assumed that you knew what had happened."

Harry finally got his emotions totally under control. "You thought that Dad had told me. It's not your fault."

"That's very generous of you to say that, Harry, but as the adults we are supposed to look after you." Sirius wiped a final stray tear that was falling down Harry's cheek away. "I'd better tell you about what happened after you stabbed the diary, just in case there's something you don't know."

Harry listened intently as Sirius told him what happened.

"As the diary exploded, Lockhart threw himself onto you, shielding you from the worst of the blast. I was too far away to help you. As soon as the diary was destroyed, Riddle disappeared." Sirius didn't tell Harry that Riddle's screams been horrific as he was ripped apart atom by atom in front of Sirius. "I then floated each one of you over to Lily, and activated my emergency portkey which took all of us to St. Mungo's. I was really concerned that it wouldn't work. Either the school let us portkey out, or the wards don't stretch into the Chamber."

Harry had been told all of this by Remus, but he appreciated what Sirius had been trying to do. "Thanks, Sirius." Harry then yawned.

Sirius decided to postpone the visit to Lily until the next morning. "I'm going to put you to bed now. You're too emotional and exhausted to cope with a visit to Lily right now."

At Harry's half-hearted protest, Sirius held up his hand. "You need some rest. I'm going to pop you into bed and fetch you a nice nutritional potion. You're far too thin for your own good."

Harry tried to struggle to his feet, only for Sirius to gather him up and stroll out of the room. Harry realized that Sirius must be very fit; he

hadn't even flinched at Harry's weight, and even now, was making light of the two sets of stairs.

Ten minutes later, Harry was tucked up in bed, having just finished a chocolate flavored nutritional potion. Sirius had told him to get used to them, as he would be prescribing two potions a day for Harry until he gained back the weight he had lost. Sirius then left the room.

A few minutes later, just as Harry was falling asleep, the door opened once more. Harry sat up. "Jamie, is everything okay?"

"I can't go to sleep without apologizing to you. I still blame you for not telling someone about the diary but I know it's not your fault what happened to Mum." Jamie held out his hand.

Harry didn't bother to point out that if Jamie thought Harry could have told someone about the diary, then the same reasoning could have been applied to Cho. It was just easier to let it go. "Apology accepted."

Jamie turned away. "I'll let you get some sleep then."

"Night." Harry rolled over and quickly fell into the first night's sleep he had without nightmares since leaving the hospital.

My thanks to Aealket for his suggestion to use Luna to get Harry out of his funk!

Sorry, learning more about Felidae will have to wait until the next chapter. This one was getting rather long, and so I decided to split the chapters into two, with the next one focusing on summer including more about Peter; what's happening with the Prewetts; Lily and Sirius talk; Harry's and Jamie's birthdays; Dumbledore resurfaces and Remus gets a shock.

I will probably update either this weekend or Monday.

Chapter 28: A Summer of Discoveries

19th June 1993

Harry awoke early and quickly washed and dressed, before making his way downstairs. He hadn't even made it halfway down the staircase before he was accosted by Anna.

"Jamie said I've got to say sorry." Anna informed Harry. "So here I am saying sorry."

Harry didn't find it a particularly heartfelt apology but under the circumstances he decided that it was the only one he was likely to get. "Thank you."

With that, Anna swung around and disappeared with a parting message. "Dad's in the dining room."

Not having any idea where the dining room was, Harry just stood in the hallway, unsure of which direction to take, until Cassie suddenly appeared at the top of the staircase. "Harry!"

"Cassie, slow down." Harry was worried that the little girl would slip in her hurry to reach him.

Heeding Harry's worried call, Cassie slowed down her steps. "Do you want some breakfast? I do, I'm hungry."

Not giving Harry a chance to respond, Cassie grabbed his hand and pulled him towards the second door on his left. On entering, Harry was taken aback at the amount of silver platters covered with matching silver lids that littered a huge cabinet at the back of the room.

"Is this all breakfast?" Harry whispered to Cassie.

Cassie nodded. Sirius put down the newspaper and left the table to swing his daughter around before placing her back on the floor. "Good morning angel. Good morning Harry. Help yourself to

breakfast. The house elves went a bit wild when they found out we had a guest staying."

"Thanks Sirius." Harry walked up to the cabinet and started lifting up the lids until he found something he wanted to eat. After having put some bacon, egg and toast onto his plate, Harry walked over to a seat and sat down. In front of him sat a jug of orange juice to which Harry gratefully helped himself; he wasn't really that fond of pumpkin juice so he was glad to find the more muggle orientated drink here.

"Do you feel up to seeing Lily today?" Sirius took a mouthful of coffee.

Harry nodded his head, his mouth too full of food to speak.

"Good. I'll get Jamie up and we'll set off in about twenty minutes. Is that okay with you?" Sirius stood up and headed for the door.

Harry nodded again and carried on eating.

Five minutes later the door flew open as Jamie, looking as if he hadn't bothered to brush his hair, bolted in and headed for the serving dishes at the back of the room. Harry felt a small niggles of disgust at the amount of food that Jamie piled onto his plate.

After an uncomfortable ten minutes where Jamie practically inhaled his food without stopping to chew, Harry found himself wrapped in Sirius arms once more as they flooed out of the Manor. Sirius again had to stop Harry from stumbling on their arrival at the hospital. Jamie walked casually out of the fireplace, brushing off his robes as he did so. Harry groaned quietly. It looked as though Jamie was far better at this than he could ever hope to be. He just hoped his twin never got to witness him traveling that way.

"Let's go boys. Now don't forget, your mother knows nothing about you two not living together." Sirius looked concernedly at Jamie, who had a habit of putting his foot in his mouth.

"I won't forget." Jamie marched briskly in the direction of the stairs.

As soon as they reached the first floor, Sirius took the lead steering the boys in the direction of the private section of the ward, known as the Black Wing. One of Sirius' ancestors had donated a tidy sum for the wing to be built, on the proviso that should any of the Blacks ever need a hospital room, then they would be placed here, and not in the public wards. It had been in this wing that Harry had been placed at Sirius' behest during his stay earlier that year, the only difference being that Harry had been on the ground floor.

Reaching Lily's door, Sirius knocked and ushered the two boys in.

A few days later

Sirius stopped outside of Lily's room and, knowing he couldn't put it off any longer, pushed open the door.

Lily was concerned by the grave look on Sirius' face. She started to become even more alarmed when he finally spoke. "Lily, we need to talk."

"Is something wrong?" Lily was scared that he was going to tell her that she wasn't going to get better.

"Don't worry, there's nothing physically wrong with you that we can't deal with." Sirius moved to stand at the end of Lily's bed. "It's something to do with your personal life."

Relieved at not having to deal with a prolonged illness, Lily now wondered what she had to face about herself. "Okay."

"Lily, I'm not sure how to say this." Sirius hesitated before continuing. "But after James died you got remarried."

Lily was stunned. "But if I got remarried, why hasn't my husband been to see me?"

"He has." Sirius was about to tell her it was him, when Lily interrupted him.

"Was I sleeping when he came to see me? Do we have any other children?" Lily would have continued with her almost manic questioning if Sirius hadn't held up his hand.

"Slow down Lily. Yes, you do have more children. You have another son, Orion, and two daughters, Cassiopeia and Adrianna. And no, you weren't sleeping when he came to visit." Sirius watched Lily's face take on a look of puzzlement.

Lily thought hard about who had been to see her but came up blank. "Why don't I remember seeing him then?"

Sirius swallowed hard before answering. "You do, Lily. It's me. I'm your husband."

Lily's face initially reflected her shock, then it changed just as suddenly as Lily burst out laughing. "That's a good one, Sirius. You really had me going for a minute."

"But I'm not joking." Sirius protested.

Lily shook as she laughed. "Come on Sirius. You really expect me to believe that we're married?"

Sirius turned on his heel and stalked out of the room.

Lily's laughter died as she watched Sirius leave her room, his face a picture of anger and desolation. "Shit."

Sirius briskly marched up the corridor and headed for the nearest apparition point.

Remus looked up as a crack sounded behind him. It was Sirius. "What's wrong?"

"I need someone to talk to." Sirius admitted.

"I take it that things didn't go well when you spoke with Lily." Remus had had a feeling that they wouldn't.

Sirius barked a bitter laugh. "She bloody well laughed at me. She thought I was joking."

Remus didn't bother to point out that it was exactly the same kind of stunt the Sirius Lily remembered would have pulled. "Let's get out of here." Remus went to the cupboard and pulled out two muggle jackets. "Put one of these on."

Sirius looked at the muggle jacket as if it was something that would bite him.

Remus sighed. "We're going to a muggle pub."

Sirius begrudgingly put the leather jacket on, and waited as Remus stuck his head through the door leading to the stairwell and yelled. "Nia, I'm going out. I don't know when I'll be back." He then turned to Sirius. "Take hold of my arm."

Sirius did as he was told, and within a short time, found himself sitting in a slightly smoky muggle bar. "Not exactly the Ritz is it?" The Ritz was one of the few muggle places Lily had taken him to.

Remus stood up. "Shut up and tell me what you want to drink."

Sirius dutifully complied and watched as Remus walked up to the bar.

Claire looked up as Remus headed towards her. "Remus Lupin, we haven't seen you in here for some time."

"I've been busy. Can you get me two double scotches and a couple of pints of Newcastle?" Remus flashed Claire one of his most beguiling smiles.

Claire swiftly got Remus' order together and placed the drinks on a tray. "That'll be six pounds sixty. Can I get you anything else?"

Remus watched as Claire leant forward, the front of her blouse falling open as she moved. "That will be it for the moment." He then paid for his drinks and picked up the tray.

“Well, if you change your mind, you know where I am.” Claire watched as Remus walked back to his equally attractive friend.

“Merlin Remus! She was practically offering herself to you on a platter.” Sirius exclaimed.

“Claire’s always been very accommodating.” Remus passed Sirius his drinks before placing the tray at the side of the table and sitting down.

“You mean to say that you’ve slept with her?” Sirius looked at Claire again before turning back to Remus.

Remus looked uncomfortable and nodded. “If you must know, then yes I have.”

“I take it you haven’t exactly been faithful to Petunia then.” Sirius observed.

Remus sighed and shook his head. “Not exactly, no. But tell me, are you really surprised?”

Sirius responded truthfully. “Not really. Sorry to say it, but if I’d been married to Petunia I’d have been unfaithful as well.

Remus looked a little annoyed at Sirius’ response and decided to change the subject. “I didn’t think we were here to talk about my wife.”

Sirius swallowed the contents of his tumbler in one go before replying. “And I don’t really want to talk about mine.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “Then what do you want to do?”

“I want to get so drunk that I forget I exist.” Sirius got up, feeling around in his trouser pockets for his wallet.

Remus stilled his hand. “They only take muggle money here.”

"Then it's a good job I've got plenty on me." Sirius pulled out his wallet and waved it in front of Remus. "Lily always makes me carry it, just in case."

"Just in case of what?" Remus enquired.

Sirius shrugged. "I don't know. She only said 'just in case'. Must be a muggle thing." Sirius walked off to the bar, determined to forget about his wife and his problems for the night.

Remus watched as Claire turned her attention to his friend. He had a feeling that Sirius would either knock her back with a few carefully chosen words, or he would flirt outrageously with her. Hearing Claire's throaty laugh, Remus realized that Sirius had gone with the latter option.

Sirius picked up the tray with the drinks on and walked back towards Remus. "Seems like a nice girl."

"As I said earlier, she's very accommodating." Remus reiterated his prior comment.

"I found that out." Sirius pulled a piece of paper with a series of numbers and Claire's name written on it out of his top pocket.

"She gave you her telephone number?" Remus knew Sirius was smooth but that had to be a record, even for him.

"Yep. She thought I might need cheering up." Sirius grinned, the alcohol now beginning to take effect. "In fact, she and one of the other barmaids, Keira, I think she said her name was, get off at nine. I've asked them to join us."

"Sirius, are you mad?" Remus shook his head.

"Nope, just looking for a friendly bit of company, nothing more." Sirius protested.

Remus groaned. "Great, just what I needed."

"You said you've already slept with her anyway, so what's the problem?" Sirius pointed out.

"I don't have a problem with Claire." Remus snapped.

"I don't blame you." Sirius turned to look appreciatively at the barmaid.

Remus followed Sirius' gaze and shook his head. "I don't believe you'd ever cheat on Lily."

"Well, you'd be wrong then." Sirius leant back against the long seat he was currently seated on.

Remus felt angry on Lily's behalf. "You're telling the truth?"

Sirius nodded. "It was just the once."

Realizing he could hardly lecture Sirius on how to behave without being a hypocrite, Remus asked the question. "Who?"

Sirius knew his response would surprise his friend. "Alice Longbottom."

"Alice, but how?" Remus was flabbergasted.

"The usual way." Sirius told him. "We snuck out, put on our white masks and black outfits, apparated to one of the Dark Lord's revels and had our wicked way with each other in front of everyone."

Remus couldn't believe it and had been about to say so, when he realized that Sirius was messing with him. "You had me going there for a moment."

Sirius barked out his trademark laugh at the look on his friend's face.

Remus stood up. Despite the fact that they each still had a drink left on the table, he wanted to speak to Claire alone. "I'll get a few more drinks in; save us keep getting up as its becoming a little busy in here."

On reaching the bar, Remus called Claire over. "Claire, can I have a word?"

"What's up, Remus?" Claire rarely saw Remus looking as stern as he did now.

"Sirius is off limits. His wife is just getting over a serious illness, and there have been a few complications. He's just here to let off some steam." Remus trusted his friend, but he wanted to make sure that there were no temptations; he himself knew how easily things could get out of hand.

"No problem, Remus. Do you want us to forget about joining you later?" Claire was hoping that Remus would say no.

Remus shook his head. "No, a little company and fun is fine, as long as it goes no further."

Claire nodded. "Let me get you another round of drinks and I'll let Keira know."

Remus really did like Claire. She was the only muggle who knew what he was, and she was also one of the few women he'd slept with on a regular basis. "Thanks. Can you also order us both something to soak up all the booze we're drinking?"

"Sure thing." Claire grinned and waved at Sirius who was watching the pair. "Anything else?"

"Not right now. I'll see you later." Remus handed Claire a twenty pound note and told her to keep the change.

The hour before the girls finished work passed quite quickly and before Remus knew it, the girls were walking over to join them, each carrying a bucket with a bottle of champagne and ice in it.

"Champagne?" Sirius was glad that Remus had had the foresight to order food.

"I thought a little celebration might be in order." Claire began to unwrap the foil from one of the bottles. "It's the first time we've met any of Remus' friends that aren't women."

Remus grinned boastfully. "What can I say? The ladies just love me."

Sirius threw a peanut at Remus' head. "I don't think so, Moony. They just feel sorry for you."

"Moony? Where did you get that nickname?" Keira asked.

"From showing his bum too many times." Claire stepped in.

Sirius stood up. "Say ladies, why don't we get out of here and go back to my place?"

Claire stopped what she was doing and looked at Remus, before asking, "Is it far?"

Sirius shook his head. "It's actually just round the corner."

Keira gave a squeal. "Don't tell me you live in one of those big houses in Grimmauld Square?"

Sirius shook his head. "No, I've got a house in Grimmauld Place."

Keira was still impressed. "Blimey, you must have some money."

"He does okay." Remus interceded. "Sirius, are you sure this is a good idea?"

"Come on, Mooney, I'm fed up of sitting in a smoky bar. I just want to watch some movies and enjoy this champagne in a more comfortable setting."

Against his better judgment, Remus acquiesced to his friend's suggestion, picked up the bottles of champagne and followed Sirius and the two girls out of the pub.

The next day

Remus woke up to feel a warm body snuggled up to him. "Good morning, Claire."

"Is it time to get up yet?" Claire still sounded half asleep.

"Not if you don't want to. I'm going to check on Sirius." Remus slid out of the bed and pulled on his trousers.

Sirius groaned as a hand shook him awake.

"Padfoot, wake up." Remus shook Sirius a little harder. He'd always been notoriously difficult to get up when they used to drink together; it looked as if nothing had changed.

"What happened to me?" Sirius felt terrible.

"You achieved your goal. You forgot you existed." Remus smiled at his friend.

"Why are you so bloody chipper?" Sirius just wanted to find a hangover cure.

"Werewolf metabolism. It has its advantages." Remus passed Sirius what he had been desperate for.

"Thanks Remus. I needed that." Sirius picked up his wand and cast tempus. "I need to get dressed, or I'm going to be late for work."

Remus headed towards the door. "I'm just going to get a shower and take Claire home. Do you think you can drop by and see Harry before you go to work? He was looking a little under the weather yesterday. Nia thinks he's got the flu and is going to take him to a muggle doctor but I don't trust them."

"I need to check in at the hospital first and see how Lily is. I'll drop by after." Sirius pulled back the covers and headed for the shower. A thought then occurred to him. "Remus?"

Remus shoved his head back around the door. "What?"

“What happened to Keira?” The last thing Sirius remembered they had been watching a movie together, trying to ignore Remus and Claire’s antics on the other sofa.

“She took a taxi home.” Remus closed the door and headed back to his bedroom.

Sirius quickly showered and got dressed, and set off for the hospital.

At the hospital he walked up to Lily’s door and tapped lightly. Getting no response, Sirius pushed open the door a little. “It’s Sirius. Is it okay to come in?”

Lily who had been snoozing shot up in her bed, relieved beyond belief to see Sirius. “Sirius, thank goodness. I was hoping you’d come back yesterday. I’m so sorry about how I reacted.”

“It’s okay. It must have been a bit of a shock to you.” Sirius walked up to the bed and took Lily’s hand in his.

This time Lily didn’t pull away. “I really did think you were joking. It was only when I saw your face that I realized you were telling the truth. By then it was too late and you’d already stormed out.”

“I was disappointed. I’d hoped you’d be pleased that it was me you’d married.” Sirius admitted.

“I am pleased it’s you. I have to be honest though. It’s going to take a bit of getting used to the idea.” Lily hoped Sirius would understand.

Looking into Lily’s eyes, Sirius knew that she was telling the truth. “It’s okay. Take as long as you need.”

“How are the children?” Lily thought that Sirius had gone home to them.

“I didn’t see them last night.” Sirius told Lily without thinking.

Lily was curious as to where Sirius had gotten to. "Where did you go then?"

"Out with Remus and got drunk." Sirius omitted the fact that they'd been chatting to a couple of barmaids and that they had taken them back to his home.

Lily felt bad for what she had put him through. "I'm sorry, Sirius."

"Lily, don't worry about it. No harm done." Sirius knew he had to tell her about Harry. "Lily, there's something else I need to tell you. It's about Harry."

"What is it?" Lily had a feeling that she wasn't going to like what Sirius was about to tell her.

"He doesn't live with us. He lives with your sister." Sirius blurted out.

"He lives with Petunia? Why?" Lily couldn't believe it.

"Because when You-Know-Who attacked you there was a bit of a mix-up, and you were told Harry was dead. He actually ended up being adopted by your sister and Remus." Sirius waited for Lily's reaction.

"So you're telling me that not only does Harry live with my sister, but that Petunia's married to Remus." Lily's face was white.

Sirius nodded. "We didn't know anything about it until last year. You've been corresponding regularly with Harry since then, and have been starting to build up a relationship with him."

Lily burst into tears and Sirius pulled her into his arms. "I'm sorry Lily, but we couldn't tell you straight away. It would have been too much."

"I know." Lily hiccupped a little as she answered. "It's just I can't believe that my baby went to live with Petunia."

Sirius reached into his inside pocket. "I brought you these."

"What are they?" Lily asked as she took the proffered bundle.

"All of the letters that Harry sent to you. I thought they might help." Sirius explained.

"Thank you." Lily placed the bundle of letters on the bed, before looking up at Sirius. "At least I know why Harry seemed a little reticent with me during his visit, whereas Jamie was all over me."

"Harry does care for you. It's just difficult for him at the moment." Sirius looked at the letters. "Why don't you read through those while I'm gone? I need to go and see Harry."

"Is something wrong with him?" Lily was immediately concerned.

"I doubt it. Remus said he was a little off color. I said that I'd look in on him, just to put Remus' mind at rest." Sirius headed towards the door. "I'll be back later."

Lily thanked him, and picked up the first of the letters from the pile he had given her.

Sirius flooded into Darcy Cottage into the middle of what appeared to be a fight. "Have I come at a bad time?"

Remus responded tersely. "A little. However, I'd still like you to take a look at Harry. His room is at the top of stairs; you'll find his name on the door." Remus then turned his attention back to Nia as Sirius walked out of the room.

Sirius made his way up the stairs and knocked on Harry's door. Getting no response Sirius gently pushed open the door. "Harry, it's Sirius."

Harry was sitting up, hugging his knees, tears falling down his cheeks. Hermione was sitting on the bed next to him, gently rubbing his back.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Sirius was alarmed at Harry's white face.

"Feel sick." Harry barely got the words out before he threw up all over Sirius. "Sorry."

"It's okay." Sirius pulled out his wand and checked Harry over. He didn't have the muggle flu as Nia thought. From his readings, it looked as if Harry had a form of pneumonia. Sirius then cleaned himself up, and looked at Harry. "I want to take you to the hospital with me. It's nothing to worry about but I want you where I can keep an eye on you."

Harry listlessly nodded. "Can we go now?"

Harry's desire to be gone immediately convinced Sirius that something else, apart from his illness, was bothering Harry. "Is something else wrong?"

Harry nodded, more tears trickling down his cheek. "Dad's been, Dad's been..." Harry couldn't say it and buried his face into his knees again.

Sirius turned to Hermione who, up until now, had been silent. "What happened?"

"We were sitting up here when we heard Mr. Lupin apparate in. We didn't hear anything for a while then we could hear raised voices. Mr. Lupin said that he wasn't happy about how much time the children were spending with Mr. Lovegood. Mrs. Lupin told him that maybe he should spend more time with them himself then, instead of running around with, err, his whores." At this point Hermione blushed, but still continued. "They ended up having a terrible argument about Mr. Lupin sleeping around. We could hear pretty much everything."

Sirius cursed Remus under his breath before answering Hermione. "Thank you, Miss Snape."

Sirius turned to Harry. "I'm just going to talk to your Mum and Dad. I'll be back in a minute."

Remus looked round as Sirius entered the dining room. "Is Harry okay?"

Sirius shook his head. "He's got a form of wizarding pneumonia. I think he's more vulnerable at the moment because he hasn't been eating properly."

Nia stood up. "Can you treat it?"

"I can, but I need to admit him to hospital. This sort of illness can sometimes turn nasty." Sirius turned to Remus. "Can I have a word with you alone?"

Remus headed for his study, Sirius following, and shut the door. "What is it?"

"Did you stop to think for just one minute before you and Petunia got into a screaming match about your screwing around?" Sirius snapped.

"What are you going on about?" Remus asked.

"Harry and his friend. They both heard you two arguing. Harry was upstairs crying when I got there." Sirius explained.

"Shit. I'll go and speak to him." Remus went to leave, only for Sirius to stop him.

"I don't think that that would be a good idea at the moment. Harry's quite sick and doesn't need any further stress." Sirius pushed past Remus. "I'm going to portkey him to St. Mungo's. I take it Petunia found out about last night?"

Remus looked embarrassed. "Yes, she spotted a love bite Claire left on my neck." Remus turned his head slightly so Sirius could see the incriminating mark.

"You bloody idiot. You should have checked before you left." Sirius shook his head. "Merlin, Remus, why don't you use that brain you're supposed to have, and think of others before you do these stupid things."

Remus was a little angry now. "I'm not the one who suggested going back to your place."

"Did you see me climbing into bed with Keira? No, you didn't. I didn't force you to sleep with Claire, Remus. That was your own choice." Sirius growled out.

Remus realized he was in the wrong. "I know. I'm sorry."

"It's not me who you need to be apologizing to. Tell Petunia she can visit Harry in a couple of days." Sirius responded brusquely, before apparating up to Harry's room.

"Harry, I'm going to portkey us to St. Mungo's. Okay?" Sirius pulled out his emergency portkey and gathered Harry up into his arms. "Miss Snape, would you like to come too?"

Harry didn't bother responding and just snuggled deeper into Sirius' arms but Hermione nodded and took hold of Harry's arm. On arriving at St. Mungo's, Sirius immediately headed for Lily's room. Pushing open the door, he found Lily sitting up reading the last of Harry's letters, which she quickly put aside as soon she spotted Harry curled up in Sirius' embrace. "What's wrong with him?"

"He's got wizarding pneumonia. I'm going to set him in a bubble so he won't infect you, but I thought you might like to keep an eye on him." Sirius explained.

"Enlarge my bed and put him here with me." Lily ordered.

"But, Lily..." Sirius didn't get any further as Lily grabbed her own wand and enlarged the bed herself, all the time looking pointedly at Sirius.

"Put him on the bed." Lily's tone brooked no argument, so Sirius laid Harry on the bed, where he immediately snuggled under Lily's arm, and fell asleep almost instantly. Lily then turned to look at Hermione who was standing shyly in the doorway.

"Hello, I'm Lily Black." Lily held out her hand.

Hermione felt a little more comfortable in Lily's presence than she did in Sirius'. Walking over to the bed, she shook Lily's hand. "I'm Hermione Snape, Lady Black."

Lily laughed lightly. "Please call me Lily. There's no need to stand on formality with me."

Hermione liked Lily as much as she disliked Sirius. "Thank you. Is it okay if I just sit down over there?"

Lily nodded. "Of course. I think Sirius just wants to check Harry's okay."

Sirius finished scanning Harry. "He should sleep for a while."

"Sirius, why didn't Remus bring him in?" Lily was surprised at not seeing Harry's father.

"He and Nia are having a few problems. Harry and Miss Snape overheard them arguing. He threw up all over me when I first arrived. I think it was a bit of shock for him." Sirius explained.

"What kind of problems?" Lily had a fairly good idea but wanted Sirius to confirm her suspicions.

"Nia found out that Remus slept with a barmaid last night. I think it was the last straw for her." Sirius totally forgot that he'd told Lily he'd been with Remus the previous night.

"And how about you Sirius? Did you sleep with anyone last night?" Lily asked in a quiet voice.

Sirius shook his head. "Of course not. I'm not Remus."

"I believe you." After doubting Sirius once already, Lily couldn't bring herself to upset him again by questioning his word.

"Thank you." Sirius dropped the privacy bubble he'd erected around him and Lily. "I'll be back later. We still have things to discuss."

Harry stirred at the sound of the door closing.

Lily looked down as Harry opened his eyes. Because of his illness he wasn't wearing his contacts, and eyes identical to her own stared back at her. "Harry, you're going to be staying here with me for a little while."

"Good. I don't want to go home." Harry's breathing sounded a little labored as he spoke.

"Why not?" Lily gently probed.

"Dad." Harry didn't say anything else.

"What about him?" Lily pushed a little harder. She knew he would be better off getting it off his chest and not letting it build up.

"He's been, you know, with other women." Harry's voice cracked a little as he spoke.

"I'm sorry, Harry. Don't you want to see your Mum?" Lily asked.

Harry shook his head. "No. I wouldn't know what to say to her."

"You wouldn't have to say anything." Lily offered.

Harry shook his head once more. "He'll be there. I don't want to see them."

"If that's what you want, then it's fine with me. Would you like your own bed?" Lily felt Harry's head as she spoke; he definitely had a fever.

"Can I stay here with you?" Harry felt awful. He just wanted to be held by the next best option to his Mum.

"For as long as you want." Lily drew Harry closer to her and stroked his head.

“Where’s Hermione?” Harry tried to sit up.

Hermione stood up. “I’m here Harry.”

“I’m really sorry about everything.” Harry struggled to get the words out.

Hermione felt a little alarmed at his breathing. “Don’t worry about it Harry.”

Lily spoke to Hermione. “Would you mind fetching Sirius back or finding another healer? I’m a little concerned about Harry’s breathing.”

“Of course.” Hermione pulled open the door; she felt annoyed that Sirius hadn’t done anything for her friend except bring him here and dump him in a bed with Lily.

Hermione soon found a healer who came back to the room with her. “Lily, I found a healer.”

Craig smiled at Hermione before turning his attention to Lily. “We’ve actually already met. I take it something is wrong with Harry.”

Lily nodded. “Yes. Sirius brought him in this morning with wizarding pneumonia but I’m a little concerned about his breathing. It seems to have gotten worse over the last ten minutes.”

Craig scanned Harry. “I’m going to sedate him and put him under an oxygenated bubblehead charm. That should help with his breathing. He seems to be exhausted.”

Craig popped out of the room and returned after a few minutes. “Harry, I’d like you to drink this for me.”

Harry drank the potion without argument and soon slipped into a deep sleep. Craig then cast the bubblehead charm on him and Harry’s breathing evened out almost immediately. “The potion I just gave him will let him sleep for 48 hours until the worst of his infection

is over. If you have any problems Lily, just call for Beauregard. He's my ward elf here."

"Thanks Craig." Lily smiled at the man she obviously knew well, but couldn't remember.

Hermione stood up. "Perhaps I'd better find my way back home."

"Don't feel that you have to go. I'd like to get to know you better. Harry talks a great deal about you in his letters, but it's not the same as meeting someone in person." Lily picked up her wand and the chair Hermione had been sitting on flew across the room until it came to a stop at Lily's side. "Please come and sit down."

Hermione nervously walked across the room. "What would you like to talk about?"

"How about your family? I already know Severus but I don't know your mother or if you have any siblings." Lily was interested in the pretty girl who was now seated next to her bed. If Harry's letters were anything to go by, she had a feeling that Harry had a crush on Hermione. It was a pity that Hermione was already engaged.

Hermione proceeded to fill Lily in on her family, her home life and school in general. Before either of them realized, several hours had flown by.

Sirius pushed open the door to Lily's room to find Hermione seated at the side of his wife, the pair of them engaged in lively banter. "I've come to see if Miss Snape wants to return home."

"Sirius, she's called Hermione. You make her sound like an old spinster aunt." Lily laughed lightly, not having picked up on the animosity between the two of them.

"Okay, I've come to see if Hermione would like me to escort her home." Sirius smiled but it didn't reach his eyes.

Hermione graciously accepted Sirius' offer to return home. "Thank you, Lord Black. That would be very kind of you." She then turned to

Lily. "It's been so nice to meet you Lily. Hopefully we'll meet again in the future."

Lily smiled at Hermione. "I hope so. Harry's supposed to be coming to stay on his birthday for a week. Perhaps you would like to join him."

Hermione's face lit up. Even though she didn't like Sirius, she'd heard that the Black Library was without equal in the wizarding world. "I'd like that very much, thank you."

"I'm sorry to break this up ladies." Sirius interrupted the conversation. "I need to get Hermione back as I've got rounds to do in fifteen minutes."

"Thanks again." Hermione waved as she left the room and dutifully followed Sirius to an apparition point.

Sirius turned to Hermione and brusquely asked. "Are you returning home or to the Lupins?"

Hermione noticed that Sirius had dropped his pleasant act as soon as he was out of earshot of his wife. She just couldn't see what Harry saw him in. "I am actually staying with the Lovegoods. If you could return me to the front of Darcy Cottage, that will be fine."

Sirius didn't bother saying anything and put his hand on Hermione's shoulder. As he did so, he felt a shudder run through her. He knew she didn't like him, and he had to be honest, even though she was only a child, he didn't like her either.

Before Hermione could take a breath, the squeezing sensation of apparition took over her body and she suddenly found herself standing in front of Harry's home. "Thank you Lord Black."

"Miss Snape." Sirius inclined his head slightly before apparating out.

Hermione headed for Fable House thinking about Sirius Black. She couldn't place her finger on why, but she really didn't like him. When he had placed his hand on her shoulder, she had been unable to suppress a small shudder of disgust that had run through her.

Deciding that she was being probably being paranoid, Hermione headed up the pathway where she was met by Luna.

“Hi Hermione. We’ve just gotten home. Mrs. Lupin said that Harry’s had to go to the hospital.” Luna’s usual smile was missing.

“He’s going to be fine. He’s been placed in a room with Lily Black.” Hermione told her friend.

“Oh good. Perhaps they can have a chance to get to know each other better.” Luna’s beautiful smile returned at the thought of her friend bonding with his birth mother.

“Not for a few days. He’s going to be sleeping to give his body a chance to recover.” Hermione followed Luna into the cool interior of the cottage.

“Poor Harry. Perhaps things will get better for him soon.” Luna pulled Hermione into the dining room. “Do you really have to go home tomorrow?”

Hermione nodded. “I do. I miss my family.”

Luna impulsively hugged Hermione. “I’m going to miss you. It’s almost been like having a sister of my own with you stopping here.”

Hermione was touched by Luna’s admission. “I’ve really enjoyed it too. Perhaps we can do it again next summer.”

Luna’s face lit up. “That would be great. Let’s go get some ice-cream. Uncle G bought about ten gallons of different muggle ice-creams for us to try. Draco and Dudley began sampling them before we even got home.”

Hermione adored ice-cream and, deciding to stop worrying about Sirius and Harry, she followed Luna into the kitchen.

The next day

Severus was waiting for Hermione at the arrival floo in Snape Manor. Hermione flew into his arms as soon as she cleared the chimney. "Papa, it's so good to be home."

Severus was surprised at the ferocity of Hermione's greeting. "Hermione, it's only been a week since I last saw you."

"I know, I just missed everyone." Hermione grinned at her father and followed him out to the carriage to take them up to the main house. "Papa, when I've seen Mama and the others, can we speak about something?"

Severus nodded. "Of course. I also wanted to talk to you about a feature in the latest edition of Potions World."

Hermione was thrilled. She enjoyed it when Severus included her when he wanted to dissect a piece that he didn't agree with. "Okay. Perhaps I should get changed after meeting Mama though."

Severus looked at Hermione's almost impeccable clothes, marred by a little dust from her trip through the floo system and smiled. "If you want to. I'll be in my study. Just come in when you're ready."

The coach drew to a halt, and Hermione bounded out of it and into the house. Severus watched her go with a smile on his face. His wife had missed their daughter and was looking forward to being able to move back into Hogwarts for the start of the fall term so that she could see more of Hermione, as she felt that Dominic was now old enough to cope with the cold.

Hermione smoothed down the front of her dress and knocked on the door to her father's study. Severus' smooth tones entreated her to come in.

Severus got straight down to business. "Hermione, do you want to go through the paper or discuss whatever is on your mind first?"

"I'd like to talk about what is bothering me." Hermione informed her father.

“Go ahead then.” Severus sat down and indicated that Hermione should join him.

Happily Hermione slid into the space left on the sofa next to her father. “It’s about Sirius Black.”

“What about him?” Severus tried to keep his tone even.

“I’ve met him twice now. The first time I met him, he was barely civil to me.” Hermione began.

“That doesn’t surprise me. Black and I have never had a good relationship; it only follows that his hatred of me would filter down to you.” Severus responded.

“I knew that after the Whomping Willow incident you two didn’t really get on, but I didn’t know that he hated you.” Hermione wasn’t exactly shocked but she was a little surprised.

“The feeling between the two of us is mutual, believe me.” Severus told his daughter. “I wouldn’t trust Black even if my life depended on it.”

Hermione got the picture. “I have to admit, I don’t trust him either.”

“Why not?” Severus knew he had good reason to dislike and distrust Black, but he couldn’t see why Hermione would feel the same way.

“I don’t know.” Hermione admitted.

Severus was thrown as Hermione suddenly asked “Papa, can I tell you something in confidence?”

“Of course you can.” Severus promised.

“It’s about Mr. Lupin.” Hermione started. “Harry’s sick, so we were both upstairs, when...”

Severus interrupted her. “I thought you wrote and said that he had gotten over his upset with the whole Lockhart thing.”

"He had, but because he hasn't been eating well, he's come down with wizarding pneumonia." Hermione tried to continue, only for Severus to interrupt her once more.

"What has Lupin been doing to the boy?" Severus actually liked Harry, despite his unfortunate connections.

"It's not Mr. Lupin's fault that Harry has wizarding pneumonia." Hermione stopped to chew her lip nervously. "Papa, Mr. Lupin has been having lots of affairs with different women. Harry and I heard him and Mrs. Lupin arguing about it. Harry got really upset. That was when Sirius Black turned up." Hermione stopped for breath.

"Go on." Severus urged.

"Harry threw up on him." Hermione hid a smile at her father's smirk. "Black said he was going to take Harry to St. Mungo's after he had spoken to Harry's parents. He then went downstairs, and when he came back he asked if I wanted to go, so I went along."

"Is Harry alright now?" Severus asked.

Hermione nodded her head. "Yes, he's going to be fine, no thanks to Black. He just left Harry in a room with his wife. He didn't give him any medication or anything. I had to find a healer to help him."

"Is that why you don't trust Black?" Severus enquired.

"Not really, there's just something off about him. When he smiles at me, it doesn't seem real. Also when he touched me..." Hermione didn't get a chance to finish her sentence as Severus butted in.

"How dare he touch you." Severus jumped to his feet.

"Papa, he just put his hand on my shoulder to apparate me back to the Lovegoods after I visited Harry." Hermione grabbed her father by his hand and pulled him back down next to her.

Severus looked a little sheepish. He couldn't help it; he didn't like the thought of Black placing a hand on his daughter's shoulder, even if it was just for the sake of apparition. In fact he never wanted him anywhere near her again. "Sorry, Hermione."

"When he did that I felt as if I wanted to pull away. I don't know what it is, but I just don't like him." Hermione fell silent as she finished speaking.

"I can't say that I'm too unhappy about that." Severus informed his daughter. "How does Harry get on with him?"

"I think he really likes him. When Black picked him up to take him to the hospital, Harry just snuggled up next to him." Hermione shuddered at the thought of being that close to the man. "Do you think I'm being silly? I mean Harry doesn't seem to have a problem with him."

Severus shook his head. "I'd always trust your instincts, and if yours say don't trust him, then don't. But don't be swayed by my own opinion of the man."

"I'm not." Hermione reassured her father. "Papa, did you two always hate each other?"

Severus nodded. "Pretty much from the first moment we met on the train."

"How about Harry's dad?" Hermione knew Severus loathed Remus but she didn't know if it had always been that way.

"Actually no. At first we got along quite well, despite our House differences. But the more Lupin hung around with Potter and Black, the more I began to dislike him. He never stood up for himself or for anyone else against them. Lupin has always been a bit of fence-sitter and that was his biggest problem. He doesn't seem to like to upset anyone." Severus recognized the inquisitive look on his daughter's face, and sighed. "Do you want to know more about them?"

"Yes please." Hermione settled back into the sofa.

Severus realized that this could take some time, and called for Salty to bring them some refreshments. After passing Hermione a butterbeer, Severus picked up one for himself. "I first met Black and Potter on the train to Hogwarts. They came into my carriage where I was sitting with Lily. They were absolutely vile to me, and asked Lily if she would prefer to sit with them. She refused, and threatened to curse them if they didn't get out."

Hermione remained silent as Severus related his tale.

"By the time we had arrived at Hogwarts, the twosome had become a foursome. Lupin had joined up with them and another boy, Peter Pettigrew." Severus took a mouthful of butterbeer.

"Do you mean the same Pettigrew who's escaped from Azkaban?" Hermione asked. "Was he evil in school?"

"Yes, the same Pettigrew. At school he was a bit of a hanger-on. He seemed to follow Black and Potter around like a sheep. He certainly wasn't Death Eater material. I still can't believe that he gave the Potters up to Voldemort." Severus pictured the slightly overweight, insipid boy in his mind.

"Did you dislike him as well?" Hermione wondered.

"No. I didn't have any strong feelings for him either way. He never picked on me, nor did he go out of his way to be friendly either." Severus told his daughter.

"How do you think he got out of Azkaban?" Hermione had thought long and hard on this subject but had come up with no real answers.

"I have no idea. Azkaban is supposedly the most secure place in the wizarding world; it is meant to be inescapable." Severus told Hermione.

"Do you think he's a danger to Harry or Lily?" Hermione asked, sounding a little worried.

“He might be. However, I think it more likely that he’s going to go after Potter.” Severus theorized.

“But everyone knows that Harry is actually a Potter now.” Hermione pointed out.

“Yes, but Harry’s not the Boy Who Lived. Potter is the one who destroyed Pettigrew’s master, not Harry.” Severus countered.

“I hope so. Poor Harry’s had enough to deal with.” Hermione thought of her friend lying in the hospital.

Severus deduced Hermione’s thoughts. “He’ll be fine. Lily will look after him.”

“Papa, do you think you’ll ever be friends with Lily again?” Hermione asked.

“We are still sort of friends. Whether we will be close again though is another matter. I don’t really deserve her friendship after how I treated her.” Severus reminded Hermione.

“I really liked her. I spent several hours talking to her when I was at the hospital.” Hermione informed Severus.

“I’m glad. Lily is a good person.” Severus smiled softly at the thought of his childhood friend.

“Papa, you’d never cheat on Mama would you?” Hermione asked the question after seeing Severus’ face soften at the mention of Lily.

Severus answered honestly. “No. Just because I think a great deal of Lily, doesn’t mean that I would ruin what I have with your mother for a night of sex with her.”

Hermione blushed a little; she still found the thought of sex a little disconcerting. “Why do you think that Mr. Lupin does it?”

“I don’t know, Hermione. Perhaps his marriage isn’t as wonderful as mine.” Severus had met Petunia before, and he had every idea why

Lupin would cheat on her, but didn't want to blacken Petunia's character to his daughter. Petunia might have changed since he was a boy. "What is Harry's mother like?"

"I thought you knew her." Hermione observed.

"I only met her a few times. We didn't really say much." Severus skirted the truth. Petunia had hated his guts, going so far as to insult everything about him. They never spoke again after that.

"She seems very nice. She always looked harassed though." Hermione didn't really feel as if she had gotten to know Harry's mum that well, even though she had stayed there for a few days. She had to be honest with herself; she had bonded far easier with Lily Black.

"I'm not surprised. If I had to put up with Lupin I'd be fed up." Severus observed.

"I didn't say she was fed up, Papa." Hermione looked thoughtful. "Do you think it has anything to do with his being a werewolf?"

"Perhaps. I don't really know." Severus didn't really want to talk to his daughter about the baser side of a werewolf's urges, and steered the conversation back towards Sirius. "Is there anything else you'd like to know about Black?"

"I don't think so." Hermione knew Severus would answer her questions if she thought of anything else.

"In that case put him out of your mind. You probably won't have to see him again for a long time." Severus consoled his daughter.

Hermione swallowed hard. "Err, Papa?"

"Yes Hermione." Severus knew that look; Hermione was about to drop a bombshell on him.

Hermione's words rushed out. "Harry's going to stay with the Blacks on his birthday for a week. Lily asked if I would also like to visit and I accepted."

"Absolutely not. You are not going anywhere near that excuse for a human being." Severus' tone was firm.

"Please Papa, I want to spend Harry's birthday with him." Hermione's face took on a pouting expression.

"No, Hermione. I won't be swayed by your faces." Severus was adamant, despite the fact that he had already told her that she was allowed to take two weeks out of the remaining summer holidays if she wanted to spend them with her friends.

"But Harry's my best friend. I just want to spend some time with him." Hermione finished her speech and promptly burst into tears.

Severus immediately regretted snapping at his daughter. "I don't know Hermione. You've already said you can't trust Black."

"But Lily will be there. She'll take care of me." Hermione pointed out.

"Let me write to Lily and I'll give you my answer after I've heard from her." Severus offered.

"Thank you, Papa." Hermione hugged her father. "Can we look at that article now?"

"Let me just fetch it." Severus got up and missed Hermione's triumphant look. She felt a little guilty at using tears to get her own way, but she badly wanted to meet the rest of Harry's family and to get a look at the Black Library.

31st July 1993

Harry's birthday morning had not been an enjoyable one. With Harry still not talking properly to Remus, things between them had seemed false and insincere. Harry no longer felt as if he could look up to Remus and he now tended to turn more to his Mum for advice than he had previously done so.

Things had also gotten much worse between his parents, with Remus moving out of the main bedroom and into the spare one. With the arguing that seemed to flare up on a continual basis, Dudley and the girls tended to spend a lot of their spare time at the Lovegoods. Harry had been unable to escape from the arguing as he had spent the last few weeks in bed recovering from his spate in hospital; his pneumonia taking longer to get over than anyone had anticipated. Now he was finally back on his feet and was looking forward to staying with the Blacks.

Harry lurched forward as he arrived at Black Manor, and ended up on his knees in front of the fireplace.

"Harry, are you alright?" Lily's concerned face looked down at him.

"I'm just fine." Harry looked faintly embarrassed at being caught by his mother face down on the floor.

"Happy Birthday, Harry." Lily pulled Harry up off the floor and into a hug.

Still not quite sure of how to act, Harry quickly hugged Lily before pulling away. "Where is everyone?"

"They're waiting in the dining room for us." Lily put her arm around Harry's shoulders and steered him towards the room in question.

On entering, Harry spotted two small piles of presents on a large side table. He had the feeling that they were for him and Jamie. Jamie waved at Harry as he entered the room before returning to his conversation with Ron.

Upon seeing his brother, Orion shot forward. "Harry, Happy Birthday."

"Where's Cassie?" Harry noted the absence of his little sister.

"She's upstairs with Hermione showing off her dolls." Lily grinned. "I doubt whether Hermione will be resurfacing anytime soon, unless you want to go and rescue her."

Harry had really missed Hermione. "I think that I'd better go and rescue her. Exactly where is Cassie's room?"

Lily told him and Harry set off upstairs. He didn't have to look far as he could hear Cassie's high childish voice drifting down the hallway to him as she told Hermione all about her dolls.

Harry knocked on the open door and was nearly bowled over by the two girls as each vied to reach him first. "Hey slow down."

"Harry, you're here. You can sleep in my room tonight if you want to." Cassie's voice rose slightly in her excitement at seeing Harry.

"Thanks Cassie." Harry grinned at the excited girl, and turned to Hermione. "Hello, Hermione."

Hermione appraised her friend. "Harry, you're looking so much better."

"I feel it too. Everyone's waiting for us downstairs." Harry took both girls by the hand and led them downstairs.

As Harry entered the dining room with the girls, Anna spotted that Harry was holding Hermione's hand. "Harry's got a girlfriend."

Harry blushed as Lily defended her son. "Anna, don't start. Hermione isn't Harry's girlfriend. She's already engaged to Felidae."

Anna had met Felidae a few nights earlier when her parents had hosted a dinner party. What the children didn't know was that the dinner party had been a cover for a meeting of the Alliance. Anna was impressed. "Wow, Felidae's really hot."

"Anna Black, where did you learn a phrase like that?" Lily was a little shocked at her nine year old using such a term.

"A movie." Anna told her mother.

"Which movie?" Lily wanted to know so she could remove it from her daughter's viewing.

“One of the ones we watched last week. I can’t remember what it’s called.” Anna admitted.

Lily made a note to go through the films the children had watched the previous week and remove them. “I’ll let it go this time, but please don’t let me hear you talking about any other adults like that again.”

“Sorry, Mum.” Anna apologized hurriedly.

“Let’s just forget about it.” Lily turned to Hermione. “Sorry about that.”

Hermione just shook her head and whispered conspiratorially to Lily. “She’s right; he is.”

Harry felt a little dismayed at Hermione’s comment and let go of her hand. “Where’s Sirius?”

“Alice Longbottom needed him overseas. He’s not going to be back for a few days at least. Apparently things are very busy over in Hungary.” Lily explained.

Lily didn’t want to admit it, but since her release two weeks’ earlier, things between her and Sirius had been extremely uncomfortable as most of her memories still hadn’t returned yet. She was somewhat relieved by Sirius’ absence which allowed her to escape from the pressure of pretending that everything was alright.

Harry looked a little crestfallen. “Will he be back before I leave?”

Lily nodded. “Yes, he said that he will try and get back the day before you are due to go home.”

Harry brightened up a little at the news. “Good.”

Lily turned to all the children. “What do you want to do first, eat or watch Jamie and Harry open their presents?”

“Presents.” Cassie and Orion yelled at once. They’d already eaten cake and ice-cream earlier in the day when Draco and Narcissa had dropped by to deliver Jamie and Harry’s presents.

“Okay then, presents it is.” Lily sat Jamie and Harry down and picked up a present from each pile. “These are from Sirius and me.”

Harry carefully opened his gift. It was a set of mirrors. Lily saw his quizzical look. “They’re for communicating. You keep one and give the other to the person you want to talk to.”

Harry was very pleased with his gift and immediately passed one back to Lily. “I’d like you to keep this one.”

Lily felt a little choked up. She’d expected Harry to give one to Petunia or Remus, not her. “Thank you, Harry.”

Jamie opened up his gift. “Thanks, Mum.” Jamie lifted up the signed Chudley Cannons sweater his parents had managed to get for him, and showed it off to his siblings. Ron was almost drooling.

Harry then opened his next present which was from Orion and Cassie. It was a note saying that they had paid for a year’s subscription to his favorite quidditch magazine. Harry thanked them both. Jamie had received the same gift. Anna and Jamie had bought him a voucher for Quality Quidditch Supplies.

Draco had attached a note to his gift saying that he hoped it helped Harry hold onto his wand in future. Harry undid the wrapping to find an auror-class wand holster. Harry wondered how Draco had managed to get hold of one as they weren’t available for public sale.

Finally Harry opened his gift from Hermione. “Wow, Hermione, it’s brilliant.”

Hermione blushed as Harry pulled out a broom polishing kit. “I’m glad you like it.”

Despite Hermione’s engagement to Felidae, Lily was convinced that Hermione liked Harry as much as Harry appeared to like her.

Jamie's yell startled everyone. "Thanks Harry. Look, Mum, Harry got me three tickets to the next Chudley Cannons match. Can I go?"

Lily had found out that Jamie was almost as crazy about the Cannons as his friend Ron. "I'm sure Sirius will take you. Who are you going to take with you?"

"Ron, of course." Jamie turned to grin happily at his friend, who looked as if he had died and gone to heaven. Having finished opening his presents, Jamie's mind turned to the next most important thing to him. "Can we eat now, Mum?"

Lily grinned at her ever-hungry son. "Don't you think you had enough earlier?"

Jamie shook his head. "Nope. I'm starving."

Laughing, Lily led the children outside where a meal had been laid out in the sunshine. The day continued in a pleasant fashion until eventually all the children trooped tiredly off to bed. After checking they were all asleep, Lily set off for the entrance fireplace and placed her hand on the mantel to open the entrance up. Ten minutes after doing this, Lily watched as Felidae and a tall blonde man stepped through into the hallway.

Felidae smiled at Lily. "I hope you don't mind but I've brought my brother with me."

"Of course not. Please, let's go into the drawing room." Lily led the way. Once in there she cast several spells before turning to the two men. "Can I get you something to drink?"

Both men opted for red wine and Lily joined them. "I've decided to accept your help. I can't cope without my memory."

Felidae nodded. After the last Alliance meeting he and Lily had been quietly chatting when she had mentioned her frustration at only having regained a few partial memories. He had said that he might have a way to help her and would be in touch. He had contacted her

the previous night when he had told her that while he could help her, the ritual he planned to use did have some element of danger. "You're willing to take the risk? You do know that if it doesn't work, you could lose even more memories than you have already."

Lily nodded. "I'm willing to take that chance. I feel as though I'm living a half-life at the moment. I barely know my children; my work is lying around half-finished because I don't know where I've gotten to, and I'm fed up trying to hold Sirius at arm's length."

"In that case, I'd like to introduce you to my brother, Leo. He's going to perform the ritual." Felidae explained.

"I'm pleased to meet you Mr. Venant." Lily held out her hand.

Leo shook his blonde mane. "I'm not actually Mr. Venant."

Lily looked confused. "But..."

"I'll explain after the ritual." Felidae got up. "Are you sure we won't be disturbed in here?"

Lily nodded. "The house elves have been informed to alert me only if there is a problem with the children."

"Very well. You'll need to lie on the floor." Felidae nodded at Leo who got up and bent over Lily as she lay down.

Lily watched as Leo pulled out a small ankh; she immediately recognized the Egyptian representation of life. Leo placed the amulet on Lily's forehead and spoke a few words in what Lily presumed to be Egyptian. After that all coherent thought left her head as she was bombarded with image after image of her life. Felidae watched as Lily writhed on the floor. He knew that she probably wasn't aware of her screaming as Leo forcibly ripped open her blocked pathways using the ankh. Eventually Lily quieted and her body relaxed as the pain ebbed away.

Lily opened her eyes. "Ouch."

Felidae reached down and pulled the redhead to her feet. "Did it work?"

Lily nodded and staggered back into a chair. "I feel as though my head is going to explode though."

Leo pulled out a vial, and passed it to Lily who immediately tossed it back, sighing as the headache receded. "Thanks."

Leo spoke gently to her. "Things will seem a little strange for a few days as your mind recovers; almost as if the memories aren't yours. Don't worry. This is perfectly normal."

Leo was right. Even though Lily knew that the memories belonged to her, it was almost as if she was seeing somebody else's life.

Felidae interrupted Lily's musings. "Lily, it is important that no-one else knows about Leo. One of the reasons I introduced you to him was because I can't perform the ritual, and I knew how desperate you were to recover your memories."

Lily wondered what other reason Leo could have for being there, but pushed it to the back of her mind as she realized that she might have a problem. "You mean that I can't tell Sirius how I got my memories back?"

Felidae nodded. "I'm sorry but I need you to swear an oath that you will not discuss Leo or his part in being here with anyone else."

"What if Sirius finds out?" Lily asked.

"How could he unless you try to tell him?" Leo asked.

"He's a pretty good Occlumens and Legilimens. My vow will only stop me discussing it. It won't stop Sirius being able to enter my mind if he wants to. I'm not particularly good at hiding my memories." Lily informed them.

"I can use a form of the Fidelius Charm to hide our discussion if you'll let me." Leo informed her. Leo couldn't see why Sirius would find it necessary to enter his wife's mind, but kept his opinion to himself.

Lily was instantly fascinated. "That's amazing. I've never heard of being able to use the Fidelius on someone's mind before. Where did you learn about that?"

"Do you want me to go ahead and perform the spell?" Leo refused to say anything more until Lily had agreed.

"As long as it doesn't affect my regained memories, then yes." Lily forced herself to relax.

Leo smiled. "It won't and it also doesn't hurt; just relax."

Felidae took Lily's hand in his own while explaining his reason for doing so. "Leo is going to cast the spell and I am going to act as your secret keeper. I need to be touching you while we do it."

Lily held firmly onto Felidae's hand as Leo performed his second ritual of the evening.

"That one always takes it out of me." Leo sat down, breathing a little heavily. "Lily, I should mention that if Sirius does enter your mind, he'll just see a blurry fog where this memory should be. He'll just presume that it is one of your forgotten memories that hasn't returned."

"What happens now?" Lily asked.

"At the end of our discussion, I will finish the spell in its entirety, concealing everything that has been discussed here." Leo explained.

"Good, in that case I'd like to hear all about you. Felidae's never mentioned you before." Lily smiled brightly at the big bear-like man in front of her.

"That's because I asked him not to. He's probably not told you all about himself either." Leo wagged his eyebrows at his brother who

frowned angrily at him. "Stop pulling faces, Dae. It's not as if she going to tell anyone."

Felidae grimaced as Lily now fixed him with her stare. "Okay, okay. Lily, my real name is not Felidae Venant."

"Then what is it?" Lily asked.

Felidae hated telling anyone his first name and scowled as he told Lily. "It's actually Felix Flamel, but my family and friends call me Dae."

Lily hid her smile and asked Leo about his name. "And is yours really Leo?"

Leo scowled even harder than Felidae had. "No. It's Fitzwilliam Flamel, but I prefer to go by my mother's pet name for me."

"Are your names supposed to mean something to me?" Lily asked.

Leo nodded. "Our parents are quite well known."

"Your parents are the Flamels, as in Nicolas and Perenelle Flamel?" Lily guessed at the only Flamels she was aware of. "But I thought that they didn't have any children."

"We're not their natural children. They adopted us when we were ostracized by our families." Leo explained.

Lily's maternal heart went out to both men. "I'm so sorry. I don't know how someone could do that to their children."

"I ran away from home because my parents wanted me to follow their master, and I refused. They tortured me until I escaped." Leo explained. "Dae had a different problem. As his parents were dead, it fell to his brother to take care of him. It was the same brother who, because Dae didn't agree with his ideals, cast him aside."

Lily quickly deduced what Leo hadn't exactly come out and said. "You're both from Death Eater families aren't you?"

Lily gulped a little nervously when both men confirmed her suspicions. "Are either of you Death Eaters?"

Both men shook their heads. "Definitely not." Felidae sounded terse in his response.

"I'm sorry but I had to ask." Lily apologized.

Leo put a hand on Felidae's arm. "It's okay we understand."

"How did the Flamels come to adopt you?" Lily was interested in how the couple managed to adopt ex-Death Eater children.

Felidae answered first. "Our mother, Peri, came across me lying on a beach. I'd been attacked by You-Know-Who's most trusted Lieutenant."

Lily gasped. It had been rumored that Voldemort had had an inner circle of trusted Lieutenants, each of whom was privy to everything that Voldemort knew. "It was only ever rumored that You-Know-Who had Lieutenants. How the hell do you know that he had them, let alone that it was his most trusted Lieutenant who attacked you?"

Felidae realized his mistake as Lily jumped to her feet and pulled out her wand. "Lily, it's not like it seems."

"Then tell me exactly how it is." Lily snarled.

Leo sat calmly in his chair and sipped his wine while watching his brother trying to defend himself against Lily's accusations.

Felidae looked at Leo. "Well, aren't you going to help?"

Leo grinned and shook his head. "Nope."

Lily let down her guard as she watched the byplay between the two brothers. It was all Felidae needed as he shot forward and grabbed Lily's arm, forcing her to relinquish her wand to him. "I'm not a Death Eater. Lily, I promise I won't hurt you." Felidae then let go of her. "Please hear me out."

Knowing that she little choice as Felidae now had her wand, Lily agreed. "This had better be good."

"As I was telling you, I was attacked by one of You-Know-Who's Lieutenants." Felidae began.

"Who was he?" Lily wanted to know.

"I can't tell you that. When I joined the Dark Lord's side, I had to make an unbreakable vow not to reveal the identities of his Lieutenants to anyone, not even other Death Eaters." Felidae explained. "While I am aware of three of them, I'm not sure that I know who all of them are."

"But you said you weren't a Death Eater; if you joined then you must be." Lily accused. "You even call You-Know-Who the Dark Lord."

"Look, I admit I was a Death Eater. When I first joined, I agreed with the Dark Lord's ideals. I disliked the idea of muggleborns watering down the bloodlines in the pureblood families." Felidae snapped. "However, I fled just before the Dark Lord's downfall."

"I hope you're aware that I'm actually muggleborn." Lily sounded bitter as she spoke.

"I am." Felidae told her. "As things began to change, I became more and more disillusioned with the Dark Lord's principles. The final straw came when I learnt about the planned attack on you and your family."

Lily's eyes flashed fire. "You knew he was going to attack us and did nothing?"

"I didn't know how he found you; just that he had. He was only going to be taking his Lieutenants with him." Felidae told Lily. "It was only after the attack that the truth about Pettigrew betraying you came out."

"Was he one of Voldemort's Lieutenants?" Lily knew Felidae wouldn't be able to answer but she still wanted to ask the question.

"We don't know." Leo interjected. "We searched him when he was first taken into custody but we couldn't find a dark mark anywhere on him. It was only his confession and your own testimony that led to his conviction for James Potter's death."

"And now he's escaped. He could be rounding up all of the Lieutenants right now." Lily's wondered exactly who 'we' was and what Leo's role in all of this could be.

"We're still not sure he is a Death Eater." Leo reminded Lily.

"He must be. Why else would he have betrayed us to You-Know-Who?" Lily pointed out.

"I don't know. However, we've got a fairly good idea as to where he's heading. We've had two positive sightings of him." Leo informed her. "One was north of Manchester, and the other not far from Leeds."

"So he's in the North of England. What is so interesting there?" Lily pondered.

Leo told Lily of his own theory. "I think he's heading for Hogwarts or Hogsmeade."

Lily's legs suddenly felt shaky. "Do you think he's after Jamie?"

"We think that might be the case. However, we are going to put measures in place for the school and village's protection." Leo told Lily. "Lily, we will do everything we can to look after your son."

"Thank you." Lily felt reassured by the big blonde's air of confidence. "However, I still would like to know where his Lieutenants are now."

"One is in Azkaban; the other two that I am aware of are free." Felidae admitted.

Lily stood nose to nose with Felidae as she enunciated each word. "I want to know who they are."

Leo rejoined the conversation. "I'm afraid we can't tell you."

Lily finally voiced her earlier thoughts. "Who exactly is we?"

"The Ministry of Magic." Leo enlightened Lily. "I actually work for an organization in the Ministry who are working to find these people; so does Felidae."

"But how does a Death Eater get a job at the Ministry?" Lily was a little confused.

Felidae cursed himself for slipping up earlier; he knew that Lily would now just view him as Death Eater and nothing more. "I told you, I'm not a Death Eater any longer. I haven't been one for some time. I've been working with the Ministry to try and help them track down all the remaining Death Eaters."

"But I thought you made an unbreakable vow." Lily pointed out.

"That only applies to his Lieutenants. The rest of his men are fodder; he didn't care what happened to them." Felidae told Lily.

Leo tried to comfort Lily. "Even though Felidae hasn't been able to tell us anything about them, we still have some idea as to who they are."

"Why haven't you arrested them then?" Lily wanted to know.

"Because we have no proof." Leo admitted.

Lily started pacing. "What about their dark mark? Isn't that proof enough?"

"No. We discovered that Voldemort doesn't brand his Lieutenants on their left arms." Leo told Lily.

"How could you know that?" Lily's head was now starting to ache again.

Leo sighed; he was going to be roasted when he reported in the next day. "When we took Bellatrix Lestrange into custody she didn't have a dark mark on her left arm. However, she freely admitted to being a

Death Eater and being proud of it, so we searched every inch of her body until eventually we found a tiny barely visible dark mark.”

“Where was it?” Lily was intrigued.

“Hidden beneath her left breast. It could easily have passed for a birthmark. We only found it because we were looking for it.” Leo disclosed.

“Great, so his Lieutenants could be anyone.” Lily observed.

“As I said earlier, we do have some idea as to who they are. Unfortunately Dae can’t confirm or deny our suppositions.” Leo refilled his wine glass and did the same for Lily and Felidae. “Lily, can we put all discussion about the Death Eaters aside at the moment. There’s something else I want to talk to you about.”

“What is it?” Lily wondered if this was the other reason that Felidae had brought his brother along.

“As I mentioned, I’m part of an organization at the Ministry. We’d actually like you to become part of it as well.” Leo sat back and waited for Lily’s response.

Lily was shocked. “But why me? I’m nobody special.”

“Actually it’s your expertise in the field of charms we are after. I’ve already had you investigated. Your work for Charisma is outstanding. We’d like you to bring your expertise to my department.” Leo explained.

Lily was flattered. While she enjoyed her work at Charisma, the premise of getting her teeth into something more stimulating, piqued her interest. “I’m interested, but I’d need to know a little more before I commit.”

Leo spent the next fifteen minutes filling Lily in on the bare bones of his organization.

Lily was fascinated. She had no idea that such a department actually existed. "You've found yourself a new recruit."

Leo stood up. "Then that's settled. I'll be in touch again before your husband returns."

Lily also stood up. "Felidae, before you go, I want to know, does Remus Lupin know what you are?"

Felidae nodded. "He knows what I was."

"And he still trusts you?" Lily had to know.

"He does." Felidae hoped Lily wouldn't take it out on Remus.

Lily's words surprised Felidae. "In that case I am willing to trust you as well."

Felidae felt relieved. "I'm glad to hear it. I meant what I said. I really am no longer a Death Eater despite the fact that I still bear the dark mark. I also no longer have the same feelings for muggleborns."

"I believe you." Lily really did. A lot of it had to do with Leo; for some reason she couldn't explain, Lily trusted the blonde man without question, even though she had only just met him. If Leo and Remus trusted Felidae, then she would as well.

"I think it's time we let you get some rest now." Leo opened the door and headed towards the fireplace.

Lily followed with Felidae walking behind her, after passing her wand back to her.

Leo took Lily's hand in his own and brushed a light kiss across her knuckles, his head inclined. "It's been a pleasure, Lily."

Lily recognized the pureblood stance immediately and wondered which family Leo came from. Suddenly she realized something. "You didn't finish the spell."

Leo smiled. "I did, you just didn't notice me doing it."

"Oh." Lily turned to Felidae and hugged him. "Dae, you are always in my home."

Felidae felt himself choke up at Lily's acceptance of him, despite what he had just told her. "Thank you."

The two men then departed and Lily closed the fireplace up. As she headed up to bed, she realized that she had been diverted about finding out more about Leo by Felidae's confession. She would have to ask him about his background when she saw him next.

The next day

Harry was delighted when Lily explained that somehow she had regained most of her memories overnight, as were all the children. After hearing the news, Harry looked seriously at Lily. "Can I talk to you alone?"

Lily turned to the other children. "Don't touch anything; I'll know if you have."

Hermione watched as Lily and Harry left the room. She wondered what Harry could have to discuss with Lily. Sighing she turned her attention to Cassie, who by now had latched onto Hermione as easily as she had Harry.

"Let's go in here." Lily opened the door to a room where a large billiards table was set in the center of the room. Dark paneling covered the walls and torches were set around the room at measured intervals. "It's a little gruesome I know, but Sirius loves it. He refuses to let me redecorate."

"Lily." Harry's voice sounded nervous as he spoke. "Can I call you something different than Lily?"

"What would you like to call me?" Lily's heart began to race a little as she spoke.

"I don't know." Harry admitted. "I just feel awkward calling you Lily after all this time. I know mum is my Mum but you are as well. I think it's more important now, particularly as you have gotten your memories back."

Lily felt her heart soar. "Well, I don't think Mrs. Black will work then. How about Lils?"

Harry shook his head. "I was thinking of something more, err, motherly."

Lily realized that Harry was struggling to find a way of calling her mum without upsetting his own mother. She had watched at the hospital as Harry had tried to keep the peace when Petunia had visited. Lily knew that her sister had been unhappy about Harry sharing a hospital room with her. Lily was just glad that she had taken the precaution of moving Harry into a bed of his own before Petunia had visited. Things had been difficult enough as it was, with Petunia barely speaking to her, and concentrating solely on Harry. Both she and Harry had been happy when the visit had ended. Petunia hadn't visited again, opting to keep in contact with Harry via letter instead.

Lily thought about Harry's request before finally coming up with a solution. "How about Maman? My great-grandmother was French."

"Maman." Harry rolled the word around his tongue. "I like that."

"I do too." Lily smiled but wanted to check that Harry wasn't doing it for solely for her benefit. "Are you sure about this, Harry? I don't want you feeling that you have to call me anything other than Lily."

Harry looked a little worried. "Don't you want me to call you Maman?"

Lily pulled Harry into her arms. "Harry, hearing you call me Maman is the best thing I could have wished for."

Harry held tightly onto Lily and the two just stood there for a while before Harry finally pulled away. "There's a couple of other things I wanted to ask you about."

"You can ask me anything." Lily told her son.

"I received a few proposals in the mail yesterday. I don't really know how to deal with them. I would normally have asked Dad but..." Harry's voice trailed off.

"I understand Harry. Exactly how many proposals did you receive?" Lily asked.

"Twenty-two." Harry blushed.

"Twenty-two?" Lily was astounded. Jamie had received ten, but being the Boy-Who-Lived, she had half expected it.

"I'm obviously going to say no to all of them but there's one I'm not sure how to deal with." Harry explained.

"Who's it from?" Lily was curious as to why Harry would have a problem with just one of them.

"Pansy Parkinson." Harry told his mother.

"She's the young lady who was your girlfriend before she was petrified, isn't she?" Lily checked.

Harry nodded. "I don't want to lose her friendship but I know I don't want to marry her."

"I think in that case, you should tell her in person." Lily advised Harry. "I'd hate to get a rejection via letter. I take it she really likes you."

"I think so. Draco told me she didn't stop going on about me after they unpetrified her." Harry admitted.

"Then set up a meeting with her, and tell her face to face. She might stop being your friend for a while but that's only to be expected. Give her some time and space to get over her disappointment and I think she'll return to being your friend in time." Lily knew what she was talking about; she went through the same thing with her and Remus. "What else did you want to discuss?"

"I want to learn how to become an animagus like you." Harry had originally intended to ask Remus, but in light of the current circumstances, decided to ask Lily instead.

Lily tried to discourage Harry. "Don't you think you're a little young for that yet?"

"I think it would have helped me if I'd been able to do it when we were in the Chamber. Look at how you used your abilities." Harry argued.

Lily thought for a few moments. "If I do this, you have to promise me that you will not abuse what you are being taught."

Harry nodded his head eagerly. "I wouldn't."

"Don't get too excited, it took me nearly two years to master it." Lily informed Harry. She didn't tell him that James had started teaching her when she a seventh year, and that they hadn't had any guidance from an expert in the subject.

Harry looked a little disheartened at Lily's words. "But if I try hard, perhaps I might learn quicker."

Lily was concerned that Harry might try to get ahead of himself. "You might. I can begin your lessons this week, but after that you are only to practice what I've taught you and not try to take it any further."

"I will. Are there any books I can read about the subject?" Harry asked.

Lily smiled. "Yes, I believe there are several in the library. Perhaps you and Hermione would care to spend a little time there this afternoon?"

Harry grinned. "You'd teach Hermione as well?"

"Only the basics. I don't think Severus would take it too well if I took this experience away from him." Lily pointed out.

"Professor Snape's an animagus as well?" Harry was surprised as he knew that assuming an anamagi form was extremely difficult, and few people actually succeeded.

Lily confirmed Harry's assumption. "Yes, he is, but please don't repeat that information to anyone, even to Hermione."

"I won't." Harry promised.

"Now, is there anything else you'd like to talk about." Lily enquired.

Harry thought for a moment. "I don't think so."

"In that case, I think we should get back to the others." Lily turned to leave the room, only to stop as she felt Harry's hand on her arm.

"Thanks, Maman." Harry hugged Lily before letting her go and walking out of the room.

"You're welcome." Lily couldn't have been happier at that moment; her son had called her Maman, her memories had been returned to her and she would soon be starting a new job. Lily grinned widely as she followed Harry out of the room.

Next chapter: We start to return to canon once more as Severus discovers who the new DADA teacher is; Dumbledore returns; Peter Pettigrew heads for Hogwarts, Hagrid takes over CoMC; Hermione tries to bite off more than she can chew; Harry and Jamie have their first brush with the Dementors, Lily starts her new job, and we meet the batch of new first years.

Chapter 29: A Return to School

Severus angrily threw Minerva's letter to the ground, and stomped off to find Virginia.

Virginia knew something was up the instant Severus entered the playroom. "Severus, tell me what's wrong."

"Not only is Dumbledore back, but Lupin is the new defense teacher." Severus startled the children with his vehement tone.

Virginia called for Bright and pulled Severus out of the room. "Let's leave the children to their playtime."

Severus followed his wife to their bedroom. "I thought that the Board would finalize Minerva's appointment, instead I find out that somehow that old bastard has managed to find his way back in again."

"Did you really expect his suspension to be permanent?" Virginia hadn't, so she wasn't convinced by Severus' statement.

"No, but I was hopeful. I don't know how much longer I can keep this up; making his potions, and behaving like his lapdog." Severus sat down on the bed, his head in his hands.

Virginia moved across the room and pulled Severus' head against her breast. "We will find a way; don't think about it any more. You will only cause yourself more pain if you do."

Severus shuddered and refocused his attention on Lupin; as he did so the pain in his head ebbed away. "I can't believe Minerva appointed Lupin. The best part is that she expects me to brew Wolfsbane for him."

Virginia became very still. "Are you going to do it?"

"Of course I will. The Headmaster will no doubt back Minerva's plan, and I will have little choice." Severus spat out bitterly.

“You aren’t going to take this out on Harry are you?” Virginie was a little concerned, as Harry was coming to stay with them for the last week of school.

Severus smiled for the first time since receiving the letter. “I actually like Harry; it would be childish of me to take up arms against the boy just because I can’t stand his father.”

Virginie let out the breath she’d been holding; she wanted the last week before Hermione returned to school to be a pleasant one. She knew how much her daughter was looking forward to Harry’s visit. “Thank you, Severus.” Virginie turned and headed back towards the door.

Severus got up. “Perhaps I’d better let you get back to the children.”

Virginie leaned back against the bedroom door blocking his exit. “Unless you have a better idea of how we could spend some time?”

Severus gave a small laugh; his wife could change her mood within seconds – it was one of the things he really loved about her. “When you put it like that...”

Severus walked across the room and pulled Virginie into his arms, making her squeal slightly before dipping his head and claiming her lips with his own.

One week later

Harry lay on his back next to the lake that bordered Snape Manor, and trailed his hand in the water. “I don’t know why you’ve got all those textbooks; we don’t know if they’re going to say yes yet.” Next to him, Hermione sat surrounded by all the textbooks she thought might need for the next term.

Hermione sounded a little exasperated at Harry’s words. “But if they do, I need to be ready. You should be looking at some of these yourself.”

"I've already glanced through them. I still can't believe you want to take five electives." Harry shook his head.

"I think it's important to get a good all-round education." Hermione protested.

"So do I, but I'm certainly not going as far as you are." Harry pointed out.

"Of course you aren't Mr. Lupin." Hermione replied primly.

"Okay, so I'm nearly as bad as you are. There was no way I was doing Divination though. Dad said it's a waste of time." Harry pointed out.

"Are things any better between the two of you now?" Hermione finally got onto the subject that she had been avoiding for the last few days.

"We're barely speaking. I still don't know what to say to him." Harry admitted. "I don't know if I'll ever feel the same way about him again after what he did to Mum."

Hermione put down the book she had been reading. "Has he talked to you about it?"

"No, we've both been avoiding being alone together. The others don't know about what Dad has done, so that has made things more difficult, especially as I promised Mum I wouldn't tell them." Harry informed Hermione.

"You know that you can't avoid him forever, don't you?" Hermione told him.

"Well at least I can until Christmas." Harry was happy that he didn't have to return home before term began.

Severus' voice interrupted the pair. "I hate to disillusion you Harry, but I found out last week who the new defense teacher is going to be."

Harry immediately deduced where Severus was going with his comment. "Professor, please don't tell me that it's going to be Dad."

"I'm afraid so." Severus sat down.

Harry pulled himself into a sitting position; he didn't feel right lying down on the grass when his teacher was there. "It looks as if most of my family will be at Hogwarts then."

Severus hid his grimace. "It does."

Harry, not really wanting to discuss his Dad or his family, clumsily changed the subject. "Professor, are there any other potions texts I can look at for third year? I've covered this one, and wasn't particularly impressed with it."

"Harry, you can call me Severus while you are here." As Virginie had asked Harry to call her by her first name, Severus had felt obliged to follow suit. "And the answer to your question is yes; I have written several texts myself which would be suitable for your purpose."

"Thank you, Severus." Severus' name felt foreign on Harry's tongue.

Severus smiled at Harry. "You're not alone in lamenting family members this term. I believe Ron Prewett will be suffering along with you as well; apparently his brother, Percy, has been made Head Boy."

Hermione looked pleased. "He'll make a good Head Boy."

Harry looked incredulously at Hermione. "He's a stuffed shirt. He'll make everyone's life a misery." Harry turned to Severus. "Who's going to be Head Girl, Sir?"

"Penelope Clearwater." Severus hoped that she would provide a counterbalance to Percy's tendency to err on the side of severity and rule-following.

Harry looked a little happier at that news. "I like Penelope; she is great with the younger students."

Hermione pulled a face. "She's a little soft don't you think?"

Severus interrupted the two of them. "Then together they'll provide some symmetry." Severus turned to look at the textbooks surrounding his daughter. "Hermione, please enjoy the rest of your break; you can study once you get to school."

"But..." Hermione began to protest.

"Hermione, I want you to put them away. You can take them out the day before you return if you must." Severus understood Hermione's drive but he didn't want her wearing herself out before school had even begun. He was already aware that the request he and Professor Flitwick had put in for Harry and Hermione had been approved, but Severus was aware that if he had told Hermione about it, she would have buried herself in her textbooks, more so than she had already done.

Begrudgingly Hermione began to pick up the textbooks, only to stop as Severus pulled out his wand, and called the books to him before shrinking them and placing them in his pocket. "I will return them to you the day before school."

"Yes, Papa." Hermione sounded sulky as she responded.

Severus got up and brushed off a few blades of grass that had adhered to his trousers. "I must get back to the house; your mother wants me to watch Dominic while she goes shopping. Do either of you want to go?"

Both children pulled a face and refused the offer. "I think we'd rather stay here and sit by the lake, Sir." Harry was still having trouble calling his teacher 'Severus'.

"Very well. Dinner will be at six." Severus walked off towards the back entrance of the house.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Hermione wailed as soon as her father was out of earshot.

“Relax. You know, it’s that thing you do when you lie back quietly and look up at the sky.” Harry grinned at his irritated friend.

Hermione didn’t bother responding and tried lying back, only to huff and puff after a few minutes. “I can’t do this. I’m bored.”

Harry got up. “Do you want to go for a walk around the lake then?”

“Okay.” Hermione held out her hand for Harry to pull her to her feet and the two of them set off around the lake.

“Are your sisters excited to be going to Hogwarts?” Hermione started a conversation after a few minutes of silence had elapsed between the pair.

“I don’t think Georgie is looking forward to it too much. She’s a bit of a homebody.” Harry told Hermione. “However, Auri is beside herself. I think she wants to see Draco again.”

Both children sniggered as they thought of how Auri had determinedly followed Draco around the entire time he had been staying at the Lupins. Harry was just sorry he had missed most of it due to his stay in hospital, and had had to rely on secondhand accounts from Hermione and Dudley.

“What Houses do you think they’ll get into?” Hermione had Georgie pegged for Hufflepuff and Auri for Ravenclaw.

“I think Georgie will make Gryffindor, and Auri Ravenclaw.” Harry surmised.

Hermione shook her head. “I bet Georgie will get into Hufflepuff. She’s too quiet for Gryffindor.”

“I disagree.” Harry argued. “I have to admit she is quiet but she’s also brave. She’s stood up to Auri countless times, and you know what a terror she can be.”

Hermione disagreed with Harry's viewpoint. "Standing up to your sister is one thing; being able to do the same with others is another."

"Well, we only have to wait a few more days, and then we'll know for sure." Harry pointed out.

Hermione then brought up the subject of Harry's Dad. "I can't believe Mr. Lupin is going to be our teacher."

"Tell me about it; there's no way I'm going to be able to avoid him." Harry looked a little despondent about it. "He's certainly going to want to discuss our problems now."

"If you don't want to speak to your Dad, you know you can always go to Papa if you've got a problem." Hermione offered.

"I don't think he can help me with this one." Harry smiled at his friend. "But thanks for offering his services."

The pair of them sat down on the opposite side of the lake under the shade of a large oak tree, as the sun, free of any obstructing clouds, began to beat down upon the children, making them feel hot and sticky.

Hermione sighed heavily while flapping a large leaf to try and cool herself down. "Would you like to go for a swim?"

"In the lake?" Harry asked.

Hermione shook her head. "No, we've got a swimming pool in the basement of the house. Mama made Papa put it in. He didn't want to as he said it was far too muggle, but Mama insisted. We all learnt to swim in it; something most wizards can't do."

"I can, Mum took all of us to the local swimming baths when we were little. Scarlett-Rose swims like a fish." Harry informed his friend.

"Let's go then." Hermione grabbed Harry's hand and dragged him towards the house.

On reaching the house, Hermione went into the playroom to find her father. "Papa, may Harry and I go swimming?"

"If you give me a minute, I'll bring the children down, so that I can keep an eye on you." Severus gathered Dominic up into his arms, and had to fend off a squealing Bas and Liv, as they too begged to go swimming.

"We can watch them, Papa, if you want to just sit on the side." Hermione offered.

Severus was relieved. While Severus had been taught to swim by Lily Black, he didn't like the muggle pastime and avoided it whenever he could. "That would be acceptable. Let me just get the children ready and we'll see you down there. You can go ahead and get in if you want to."

The next few hours flew by as Harry, Hermione, Liv and Bas all splashed and swam around in the crystal blue waters of the swimming pool. Harry enjoyed it immensely, more so because the water wasn't full of chemicals, and it had been magically charmed to remain at a pleasant temperature.

"Hermione, I think it's time Liv and Bas came out. You can stay here for a little longer if you want to. Don't forget about dinner though." Severus scooped up Dominic, who had fallen asleep despite the noise, and waited for Bas and Liv to get out, grumbling as they did so.

"Harry?" Hermione asked as she lazily swam circles around her friend.

"Yes, Hermione?" Harry wished he could swim as well as Hermione did.

"Why have you stopped wearing your contact lens?" Hermione had noticed that Harry hadn't been wearing them since he arrived.

"After meeting Maman, I've decided that I like the fact that my eyes are just like hers." Harry admitted.

“That’s so sweet.” Hermione sighed, only to suddenly gasp and disappear beneath the water. Harry immediately began to swim to where Hermione had disappeared, letting out a sigh of relief as she reappeared; her face a picture of pain. “What’s wrong Hermione?”

“Cramp. Can you swim over and pull me in?” Hermione tried to relax her leg muscles in the hope that it would go away.

Harry reached Hermione within a few seconds and soon the two of them were slowly making their way to shallower waters. As soon as Hermione reached a depth she could stand up in, she placed her feet on the bottom of the pool, and stretched out her muscles, her face relaxing as the cramp dissipated. “Thanks Harry.”

Harry watched as Hermione then began floating on her back, her long hair trailing across the water. “Hermione…”

“Yes Harry?” Hermione floated across to Harry.

Harry forgot what he was about to say as Hermione came to a stop in front of him. She was now so close that he could see the water droplets clinging to her eyelashes, framing her chocolate brown eyes as she stared intently up at him.

“Harry?” Hermione wondered what was up with him.

Harry stepped even closer to Hermione, and gently pushed her hair away from her face. Hermione swallowed hard, as she felt a shiver run through her which had nothing to do with the temperature of the water. As Harry dipped his head, Hermione closed her eyes; her heart pounding. Hermione felt Harry’s lips brush her own cautiously at first, and then, as he realized that she wasn’t going to push him away, he became a little bolder and increased the pressure. Hermione responded by sliding her arms around Harry’s waist and pulling herself into a standing position.

As Hermione’s body made contact with his, Harry suddenly pulled free of Hermione’s embrace, and took several steps backward. “I’m so sorry, Hermione. I shouldn’t have done that.”

“Harry, what’s wrong?” Hermione was surprised at the sound of dismay in Harry’s voice.

“You’re engaged to someone else.” Harry put even more distance between him and Hermione as he headed out of the pool.

“But Harry...” Hermione watched as Harry shot out of the pool room.
“Damn.”

The next day

Virginie noticed that things between Harry and Hermione seemed a little overformal in contrast to their behavior of the previous day.
“Hermione, can you please come to my room. There is something I need to show you.”

Hermione got up, wondering what was so important that her mother needed to show it to her now.

As soon as they reached Virginie’s bedroom, Virginie drew Hermione in, and shut the door behind them. “What happened?”

“What do you mean?” Hermione hedged.

“Hermione, things have changed dramatically between you and Harry since yesterday. Did you two have an argument?” Virginie watched as her daughter’s facial expression became resigned as Hermione realized that her mother wasn’t going to let her leave without finding out the truth.

Hermione shook her head. “Harry kissed me when we went swimming yesterday. Then he suddenly pulled away, told me it was wrong, and ran off.”

“What is bothering you? That he kissed you or that he kissed you and ran off?” Virginie wanted to make sure she knew what she was dealing with.

“That he kissed me and ran off.” Hermione told her mother. “He said it was because I was engaged to someone else.”

Virginie put her arm around Hermione. "Hermione, think about it. Harry is going through a difficult time in his life right now. He is essentially estranged from his father because of what Remus did to his mother. How do you think Harry felt about himself when he thought about the fact that the girl he'd just kissed was engaged to someone else?"

"I don't know." Hermione admitted.

"I think Harry's afraid he was acting just like Remus." Virginie explained.

"But he's not like that." Hermione protested.

"I know. He wouldn't have had a crisis of conscience, if he had been." Virginie smiled softly. "I think you and Harry need to talk about what happened."

At her mother's words, Hermione barely stopped long enough to hug her mother before running out of the room to find Harry.

Running downstairs Hermione couldn't find Harry anywhere. Glancing out of the sitting room window, she spotted him sitting by the lake, and headed out to join him.

Harry didn't look up as he heard footsteps approaching; he already knew who it would be.

"Harry, look at me." Hermione demanded.

Harry reluctantly lifted his head. "What's up?"

"You know what's up." Hermione began, and then got to the point she wanted to make. "Harry, just because you kissed me, it doesn't make you like your Dad."

"I know that." Harry snapped.

"I don't think you do." Hermione pointed out. "If you don't think that you're just like him, then why did you pull away from me yesterday?"

Harry reiterated what he had said the previous day. "Because it's wrong to kiss someone else's fiancée."

"Why?" Hermione badgered Harry.

Harry angrily climbed to his feet. "Because it is. I shouldn't have taken advantage of you like that."

"Harry you didn't take advantage of me. I would have stopped you if I didn't like it." Hermione laid a hand on Harry's arm. "Please Harry, don't let's spoil our friendship over one kiss."

Green eyes met chocolate brown as Harry looked into Hermione's pleading face, and Harry knew he was going to be found guilty of stealing more than just one kiss.

Harry pulled his arm free of Hermione's hand and slid it around her waist, pulling her close to him. His other hand slid into her hair as he once again met her lips with his own. For Hermione, the kiss seemed to go on forever. This time, however, Harry didn't try to run away after it ended. Instead Harry gently laid his brow against her own and admitted to her how he felt. "Hermione, I know I shouldn't be doing this, but I really like you."

Hermione was thrilled by Harry's confession. "Oh, Harry. I really like you too."

"But what about Felidae?" Harry brought up the crux of his problem.

"I don't know." Hermione admitted.

"Do you love him?" Harry asked.

Hermione was a little indignant at Harry's question, and pulled away from Harry. "Harry, I've just kissed you. How can you ask me that?"

“I’m sorry.” Harry suddenly looked defeated. “What are we going to do?”

Hermione was at a loss, and suggested what she thought Harry wanted to hear. “Perhaps we should just go back to being friends.”

Thinking that that was what Hermione wanted, Harry agreed. “Okay. We can’t tell anyone about this though.”

Hermione knew she couldn’t tell Harry that her mother knew; he’d be mortified. “I won’t. Let’s go get some ice-cream.” After her indulgence at the Lovegoods, Hermione had pestered Harry to bring some muggle ice-cream with him when he came to visit. Hermione didn’t know why, but somehow it tasted better than wizarding ice-cream.

Harry quietly followed Hermione back to the house.

On entering the house, Hermione told Harry to head to the kitchen, and that she’d be with him after she changed her shoes. As soon as Harry left her, Hermione ran upstairs, hoping to find her mother still in her room.

Hermione let out a sigh of relief as Virginie opened the door at Hermione’s knock. “Mama, I need your help.”

1st September 1993

Harry and Hermione entered the platform for the Hogwarts Express, where they soon spotted Dudley and Luna, and walked over to join them.

“Where are the girls?” Harry asked.

“Dad is just seeing them into a carriage.” Dudley explained. “Nev and his sister are with them as well.”

Seville and Neville had ended up staying with the Lovegoods as things between Nia and Remus had degraded to such a stage, that both of them had agreed that it wouldn’t be a good thing for the children to be exposed to their constant disagreements. Dudley and

the girls had also quite often found themselves staying with the Lovegoods as none of them wanted to stay home with the atmosphere that prevailed in the household. Scarlett-Rose had been hardest hit, however, as she adored her father. Even though Remus had gone out of his way to explain to his youngest daughter, that while he and her mother weren't getting along, he still loved all of the children, it had hurt Remus to see Scarlett-Rose turning more and more to Grimstock Lovegood for comfort, despite Remus' efforts.

"Harry." Remus' voice cut into the children's discussion. "Can I have a word?"

Harry reluctantly moved over to where Remus was standing. "Yes Sir?"

Remus cringed at Harry's formal address. "Harry, your brother and sisters don't know that I'm going to be the next defense teacher but I have the feeling that you already know don't you?"

Harry nodded. "Severus told me."

Remus was surprised at Harry's form of address for his professor. "That's Professor Snape, not Severus."

Harry didn't bother to tell Remus that Severus had given him permission to address him in that manner. "Yes, Sir."

"I would like to have a talk with you this weekend, Harry. Can you come to my room on Saturday evening?" Remus asked.

Harry just shrugged.

Remus bit back his anger. It was a full moon that night, and he could already feel the wolf rising in him. "I'd like a proper response."

"Yes, Sir." Harry responded almost sullenly.

Remus couldn't help it, he snapped at Harry. "For goodness sake, you can call me Dad you know."

“Yes, Dad. Can I go now?” Harry wanted nothing more than to escape.

“I’ll see you at school.” Remus turned on his heel, cursing his own stupidity in losing his temper at Harry.

Harry rejoined his friends to look for a carriage, managing to find one close to Neville and the girls. When Harry popped his head into Neville’s carriage he found that Draco and Pansy had joined Neville and the three girls. Pansy ignored Harry. She was still upset at Harry’s rejection of her, and wanted nothing to do with him.

Draco grinned up at his friend. “Hi Harry. Where are you sitting?”

“A couple of carriages up with Hermione, Luna and Dudley.” Harry lurched forward as the train pulled away.

“Hi Harry. Don’t you remember your sisters?” Auri spoke quite sharply to her brother, annoyed that he hadn’t bothered to say hello to them first.

“Hi Georgie, I’ve got your birthday present in my bag.” Harry spoke to his other sister, while ignoring Auri. “Are you looking forward to tonight?”

Georgie nodded a little timidly, and went back to her book. Auri looked pointedly at her brother.

“Auri, I can see that you are just fine, and yes, I’ve got your birthday present as well.” Harry turned to Neville and his sister. “I’ll speak to you two a little later.”

Harry returned to his carriage and the journey progressed without much ado until the sky began to darken and rain began to lash at the train, as it made its way along the tracks.

Harry shivered just as the train suddenly ground to a halt, throwing Harry onto Hermione’s lap. “Sorry.”

Hermione wasn't exactly rushing to help Harry up off her, when the lamps in the carriage flickered several times, before finally going out. Frightened screams could be heard throughout the train.

Harry, who by now had ended up kneeling on the floor, heard several voices utter 'Lumos' and soon dim wandlight filled the carriage. "What do you suppose is happening?"

"I don't know." Hermione answered. "Perhaps there's been an accident on the tracks."

The sound of doors opening reached the children's ears. "I think someone's getting off." Dudley observed.

"Or getting on." Luna had gone pale. She could sense something had gotten onboard, and whatever it was, she knew it wasn't good.

As noises came closer to the carriage, the air began to turn frigid. Harry could see his breath floating in front of him. Then the carriage door began to open and Harry felt himself plunged into a nightmare. Where was she? Why had she gone out when he told not to? Lost in his nightmare, Harry lost all awareness of what was going on around him.

Hermione watched as Remus tried using enervate on Harry to bring him back to consciousness. Failing, Remus gently slapped Harry's cheek, to see if the muggle way might work any better. Suddenly Harry's eyes snapped open. "Remus, where is she?"

Remus nearly dropped Harry in his surprise at Harry's use of his given name. "Where's who Harry?"

"Lu, where's Lu? She promised me she wouldn't go." Harry struggled to sit up, only for the room to begin spinning.

"Who's Lu, Harry?" Remus asked.

Remus suddenly found himself looking down at the business end of Harry's wand. "Remus Lupin would know who Lu was."

Remus didn't know why but he actually felt almost afraid of Harry at that moment. He realized that Harry's patience wasn't going to last as his son ground out a demand for his identity. "You're not Remus, so who the fuck are you?"

Suddenly it clicked with Remus who Lu must be, and he hurried to reassure Harry. "Luna's fine, Harry. She's right behind you."

At Remus' words Luna slid onto the floor behind Harry. "Shh, Harry. I'm here."

Harry twisted around in a fluid motion, and pulled Luna onto his lap, burying his face in her hair. "I thought I'd lost you. That you'd disobeyed me again; that you'd gone out there." Harry's voice was chilling in its raw emotional intensity.

Luna let out a surprised 'eep' as Harry suddenly pulled her head back, and began to kiss her with surprising passion and expertise.

Remus put a restraining hand on Dudley's shoulder and whispered to him. "I think he's having some sort of bad reaction to the Dementors. It's not Harry's fault."

Dudley sat back down; he didn't know what the Dementors were, and despite Remus' assumption that Harry was having a bad reaction to them, Dudley still wasn't happy at Harry's kissing his girlfriend and, judging by the look on Hermione's face, neither was she.

Remus knew he had to end this before Harry did something he'd really regret, and swiftly cast a sleeping spell on his son, while he was still distracted by Luna. As the spell took effect, Harry's head slid forward onto Luna's shoulder.

"Why did Harry just kiss me like that?" Luna asked, now that she could speak again.

Hermione, who had been dismayed at Harry's attentions to Luna, immediately jumped in with a response. "I think that thing that came into the carriage did something to him. It seemed to affect Harry more than anyone else here. I just felt miserable but I didn't collapse."

Remus smiled at Hermione. "Five points to Slytherin. That thing did do it. It was a Dementor."

Hermione gasped. "One of the guards of Azkaban? What was it doing here?"

"Looking for Peter Pettigrew. The Ministry have arranged for them to guard the school and Hogsmeade while the search continues for him." Remus explained. "I didn't know, however, that they had been given permission to board the train."

Dudley, who had been muttering under his breath, finally stopped and, still sounded pissed, asked. "Why did Harry call you Remus and why the heck did he kiss my girlfriend?"

"I don't know. Something about the Dementor's presence badly affected Harry. I don't think he was entirely aware of where he was or what he was doing." Remus still couldn't get over Harry's behavior. "Normally their effect makes you feel sad or depressed, almost as if you have no hope. However, for those who have been through some sort of terrible ordeal during their life, the Dementors can cause them to relieve that trauma, making them believe they are once again experiencing their own worst fear."

"But how can losing me be Harry's worst fear?" Luna asked. "He's never had me to lose."

"I haven't got an answer for that." Remus admitted.

"Err, Dad, what are you doing here?" Busy muttering to himself, Dudley had missed Remus' reward of points to Hermione, and had only just realized that Remus shouldn't have been on the train.

Hermione filled him in. "He's the new defense teacher."

"How come Hermione knows and I don't?" Dudley was getting really fed up now.

“Because Professor Snape told her. I wanted to surprise you.” Remus told his son.

“Oh, but...” Anything else Dudley had been about to say was cut short, as Harry started to come round.

“What happened?” Harry groaned.

“What was the last thing you remember?” Remus asked.

“Something opening the door to the carriage. Then I felt as if was all alone; that I was searching for something that was just out of reach.” Harry shivered as he spoke. “Why am I lying on the floor?”

Remus picked Harry up, and put him on the seat next to Hermione, before passing him a piece of chocolate. “Eat this. It will make you feel better.”

Harry did as he was told and soon felt a delicious warmth spreading through his body, pushing back the effects of his exposure to the Dementor.

Harry then realized that everyone was staring at him. “Have I got chocolate on my nose or something?”

Luna shook her head, and explained to him what had happened. Harry was absolutely mortified. “Oh Merlin. I am so sorry everyone. I just don’t remember.”

“It’s okay, Harry.” Luna said lightly. “It was because of the Dementor.”

Harry looked at Dudley. “Sorry Dud.”

“Nah, it’s alright. Dad said it wasn’t your fault.” Dudley could see that Harry was genuinely upset by what he had been told he’d done, and he didn’t want to distress his brother any further by giving him grief over his actions.

Hermione had remained silent during Luna’s explanation. “Harry, do you remember anything specific?”

Harry shook his head. "It was more of a feeling of loss than anything else."

Remus suddenly swore under his breath. "I need to check on Jamie Potter. After what happened with You-Know-Who, he's just as likely as you to have had a bad reaction to the Dementors."

Remus spun on his heel and headed out of the carriage. He checked all the carriages as he went, but on seeing that no-one else appeared to have been affected in the same way as Harry had, he relaxed. Eventually he found Jamie's carriage.

Jamie looked up. "Mr. Lupin, what are you doing here?" Jamie had met Remus at the last dinner party his parents had hosted.

"Are you alright?" Remus ignored Jamie's question.

"He collapsed and then was sick." Miranda Bailey, one of Jamie's Gryffindor friends, piped up.

Jamie pulled a face at her. "I'm okay now. Ron helped clean me up."

Remus got out a bar of chocolate. "Eat this. It will help."

Jamie did as he was told and soon felt a little less shaky. When that thing had entered the carriage, he had been thrust into visions that had made him sick to stomach. After taking a few more chunks, he then passed the remainder of the bar of chocolate around to his friends.

"Mr. Lupin, what was that thing?" Jamie asked.

"A guard from Azkaban looking for Peter Pettigrew." Remus simply explained.

Jamie shuddered. "It won't come back will it?"

Remus shook his head. "No, they've all been removed from the train."

Jamie looked around at his friends and turned to Remus. "Mr. Lupin..."

Remus realized that Jamie wanted to talk with him alone. "Please come with me Jamie."

Jamie got up and followed Remus. Before Remus left the carriage with Jamie, however, he turned to the remaining children. "Sorry, I should have told you, I'm your new defense teacher, Professor Lupin." Remus then turned to Ron. "Five points to Gryffindor for doing such a great job with cleaning charms."

"I bet that's the first points to be given out this year." Ron beamed happily at Colin and Miranda, unaware of Hermione's earlier award for her reasoning about the Dementors.

Remus drew Jamie towards the empty carriage he had found earlier. He hadn't wanted to join the other teacher on the train as he had needed to get some sleep before the full moon rose that night.

Once he had closed the door, Remus turned to Jamie. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know. I had the most awful vision when that thing came into the carriage." Jamie told Remus. "Why did it affect me like that? The others were okay."

"I think your experiences with You-Know-Who have affected your ability to deal with the Dementors." Remus put a name to what had come into Jamie's carriage. "Did you see anything in particular?"

Jamie nodded. "I saw You-Know-Who sticking out of Professor Quirrell's head."

Remus was relieved that Jamie hadn't been affected as badly as Harry. "Is that everything?"

"Yes, Professor." Jamie put his head into his hands, to try and hide the fact that he was still shaking.

Remus pulled some more chocolate out of his pocket. "Jamie, eat the rest of this. Do you want to stay here with me?"

Jamie swallowed a piece of chocolate, before answering. "Thanks, but I'd like to go back to my friends."

Remus escorted Jamie back to his carriage before closing the door, and telling the children to lock it if it made them feel safer.

Jamie did as Remus suggested, and then sat down. He hadn't been entirely truthful with Remus; he had seen a lot more than Voldemort's face sticking out of the back of Quirrell's head. However, he still wasn't sure if what he had seen had been real or whether it had been some sort of delusion. In an effort to forget about the nightmare the Dementors had plunged him into, Jamie turned his attention back to the conversation going on between his friends.

Remus wanted nothing more than to go back to his carriage and return to the sleep he so desperately needed but he knew that he needed to check that the other teacher was alright. On reaching the teacher's carriage in the middle of the train, Remus opened the door. Inside he found a pale, but in control brunette. "You must be Anna Jameson."

"And you must be Remus Lupin." Anna held out her hand.

"Are you okay?" Remus could feel Anna shaking.

"I'm fine, just a little shook up. I can't say that I'm particularly fond of Dementors." Anna admitted. "I've checked the students at the north end of the train, and they're all okay."

"Would you like me to stay with you?" Remus offered.

Anna shook her head. "I'll be just fine; I've got work to do anyway."

Remus then found himself being politely ushered out of the carriage. He didn't know why but he had a feeling that Anna didn't want him around. Shrugging, Remus decided to head back to his carriage. He only had a few more hours left before he needed to portkey to the

Shrieking Shack, as the train wouldn't reach the school until after the moon had risen.

The train pulled into Hogsmeade without any further interruptions, and Harry climbed out of his carriage and onto the platform. He then spent the next few minutes looking for his Dad. Dudley was obviously doing the same thing as both boys suddenly grew quite still at the faint sound of howling coming from some distance away. Harry looked at Dudley who nodded to him before putting his arm around Luna and leading her towards the carriages which would take them up to the school.

Harry waited for Hermione, who was collecting Crookshanks from the baggage cart, and watched as Aurilia dragged Georgiana and Seville towards Hagrid who was calling for first years to follow him. Harry and Hermione then both headed after Luna and Dudley. Not for the first time, Harry wished he could ride over in the boats with the first years. Harry looked at the strange looking animals which stood harnessed to the carriages; he'd been able to see them ever since his first carriage ride. As no-one else had appeared to be able to see them, Harry had said nothing.

Unseen by the schoolchildren, a small bedraggled rat searched among the crowds looking for Remus. Howling gave away the reason behind Remus' absence from the platform. With the moonlight illuminating its destination, the rat disappeared as it scampered along the ground heading towards the Shrieking Shack.

On reaching the school, Harry found himself sitting with Jamie and being checked over by Madam Pomfrey. "I'm fine. Dad gave me some chocolate." Harry explained.

"Me too." Jamie fidgeted, anxious to get to the Great Hall.

"I'm glad to hear it. You can both go then. If you feel ill at all, then I expect to see you both back here." Madam Pomfrey ordered.

Both boys walked out of the infirmary, only for Harry to be stopped by Severus. "Mr. Lupin, I need you to come with me. Mr. Potter, please make your way to the Great Hall."

Harry followed Severus to his rooms where he found Hermione sitting down, having a glass of pumpkin juice.

"I'd like you two to know that you will both be allowed to pursue the extra classes you have requested." Severus pulled out a tiny hour-glass attached to a long thin chain and passed it to Hermione. "We could only get one time-turner, so you will have to share."

"How does it work?" Hermione resisted the temptation to play with the shiny object.

"You put the chain around your necks and turn the hour-glass back one turn for every hour you wish to go back." Severus explained. "However, its use has been restricted by the Ministry of Magic. I expect you to only use for its intended purpose. Do I make myself clear?"

Both Harry and Hermione assured Severus that they understood.

Severus then pulled out a letter. "I have something else I wish to speak to you about. Lily Black wrote to me saying that the pair of you wish to start your animagus training."

Harry and Hermione looked excitedly at each other, before Harry spoke up. "Maman gave us some books to study on meditation, but she also warned us not to try to get ahead of ourselves."

"Quite right." Severus put the letter down. "I will be continuing your training. I expect you both here every Friday evening at 7pm, starting in two weeks' time."

"Are you an animagus, Papa?" Hermione asked.

"I am." Severus didn't however enlighten the children any further as to what his form was. "For our first lesson, I wish for you both to practice your meditative techniques."

"Yes, Professor." Harry stood up. "May I go now?"

“You both may.” Severus dismissed the children.

Harry and Hermione raced up the corridors. “I think that we’ve probably missed the sorting.”

Hermione slowed down slightly. “I know. I wanted to see where you sisters went.”

“Let’s get in and find out.” Harry pushed open the door. He’d been right, the sorting was over. As he looked around the room, he wasn’t surprised to see Georgie sitting with Seville Longbottom at the Gryffindor table.

“You were right.” Hermione frowned and looked for Aurilia. Both children were surprised to find her sitting at the Slytherin table. “She made Slytherin?”

Harry was a little shocked but waved at Auri who happily waved back and resumed her conversation with the dark-haired girl next to her.

Harry’s stomach grumbled as he made his way to the Ravenclaw table to sit down in a space next to George Weasley. “Hi, Harry, what took you so long?”

“I had to see Madam Pomfrey.” Harry omitted his meeting with Severus. “Where were you? I didn’t see you on the train.”

George looked around before dropping his voice. “Dad brought us to school in his new car.”

“Car?” Harry was surprised. Most wizards didn’t even know what a car was.

“It’s not just a ordinary car, Harry. It’s a flying car.” George explained.

Harry was impressed. “What was it like?”

“Great. We got really high above the clouds.” George told his friend.

“I’d love to see it.” Harry looked at George wistfully.

"I can ask Dad if you can come over for a couple of days at Christmas if you want." George offered.

Harry's face lit up. "Great. I'm sure Mum won't mind."

"Then that's settled. I'll write to Dad this week and let you know when." George told his excited friend.

Harry looked up at the head table, and turned back to George. "Did Dumbledore make any announcements?"

George nodded. "He told us about the Dementors. We can't stray into the Forbidden Forest or off the grounds. He said that he can't guarantee our safety if we do."

"Anything else?" Harry wasn't surprised by the announcement after his experience on the train.

"Yes, he mentioned Cho. Apparently she finally regained consciousness this morning." George informed Harry.

Harry felt pure relief at the news about Cho, and looked across to where Jamie was seated by Ron. He could see from Jamie's happy face that he too had heard the good news. "I'm glad to hear it. Did he say when she would be returning to school?"

George nodded. "Not until just before Christmas. It's going to take some time for her to recover."

What Dumbledore hadn't announced was that Cho was actually still suffering from the effects of the sudden withdrawal she had experienced from the loss of using dark magic. The healers believed that it would be several months before she would be able to come to terms with this.

The dinner eventually came to an end and everyone trooped out of the Hall and off to their dormitories. Luna fell into step beside Harry. Dudley was walking further ahead talking to Draco and Pansy.

“Luna, I really am sorry about today.” Harry still felt bad that he’d apparently kissed his brother’s girlfriend.

“That’s quite alright.” Luna patted his arm. “I didn’t mind.”

Harry gaped at the girl “But I kissed you.”

Luna stopped just before the entrance to Ravenclaw tower. “I know.”

“Well I can tell you now that I won’t be doing it again.” Harry assured Luna.

Luna sighed. “Pity, you’re such a great kisser.” With that Luna skipped through the entrance and went to join Dudley, leaving Harry standing open-mouthed in the doorway.

Monday morning

Harry met Hermione as she came round the corner. He quietly whispered to her. “How was divination?”

“I should have listened to you. Trelawney’s awful.” Hermione hissed as softly as she could.

Draco passed the two of them. “Shouldn’t you be heading for divination?”

Hermione just waved him on. “I’ll be there shortly. I need to speak to Harry.”

Harry shook his head. “I think this is going to get confusing.”

“Tell me about it.” Hermione exclaimed. “Let’s get to muggle studies before we’re late.”

Anna Jameson looked up as the last two students walked in. “Miss Snape and Mr. Lupin, you’re just in time. I’m afraid you’ll have to sit together.”

Harry and Hermione were both quite happy with the arrangements. Even though he was well aware of how muggles lived, Harry had still wanted to study muggles from a wizard's perception. He had been very surprised to find that Professor Jameson was extremely knowledgeable, and that she had ditched the assigned textbook in favor of several others which she herself supplied.

After listening to the Professor, Hermione still couldn't believe some of the things that muggles had done, despite what Harry had told her. She put her hand up. She wanted to check something that Harry had promised her was true. "Have muggles really been to the moon?"

Anthony Goldstein laughed at her. "Don't be daft, Snape."

"Yes, they have Miss Snape. Five points from Ravenclaw, Mr. Goldstein. I expect the pupils in my class to be respectful to others when making a statement; more so when that statement is incorrect." Anna hated students like Goldstein who had no real desire to learn about muggles, and had only taken her class because they believed it was a soft option.

Anna rummaged through the pile of photos she had brought with her, stopping when she found the picture she was looking for. "This photo was taken when a muggle called Neil Armstrong first stepped foot on the moon. Muggles went there in something called a rocket."

"Did it run on magic, Professor?" Susan Bones asked.

"No, Miss Bones. It was fueled by liquid oxygen and hydrogen. It's all part of muggle physics and chemistry; something we won't be covering here." Anna explained.

Harry was aware of what Anna was talking about and put his hand up. "Didn't the rocket split into several different bits as the fuel was used up?"

"That's right Mr. Lupin. Five points to Ravenclaw." Anna turned to the blackboard and, using her wand, revealed their homework. "Please make a note of this. I want two feet for next week's lesson."

Harry quickly wrote down the homework, noticing that Hermione was still writing down notes from the moon landing discussion that had finished a few minutes earlier. "I'll tell you all about it later, Hermione."

Hermione smiled gratefully at Harry, and copied down the homework. Harry watched his teacher as she moved round to collect the textbooks she had distributed to the class. As she neared Harry's desk, several of the books slipped out of her hand. Immediately Harry bent down to collect them off the floor. At the same time Anna bent down as well, causing her robes to shift slightly. Harry looked up as he went to pass the books to her, meeting her amber eyes. As Harry tore his gaze away from Anna's unusual eye color, something on her neck caused Harry to gasp out loud.

Anna noticed that Harry had gone pale. "Please remain after class Mr. Lupin. Everyone else is dismissed."

Anna waited before everyone had left before turning to Harry. "I know that my eye color can be a little disturbing to some people, but I can promise you that I'm not a werewolf."

"I didn't think you were, Professor." Harry replied.

"Then why did you react as you did?" Anna questioned Harry.

"I had a sharp pain as I bent over." Harry lied.

Anna was now all concern. "Please report to Madam Pomfrey."

"Yes, Professor." Harry picked up his books and left the room, to find Hermione waiting for him.

"What did she want?" Hermione asked.

"To tell me that she wasn't a werewolf." Harry answered, sounding a little distracted.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Hermione recognized Harry's anxious look.

"I don't know." Harry thought over what he had seen. "Is the offer of speaking to your father still open?"

Hermione nodded. "Why don't you go and see him tonight?"

"Can you ask him if I can see him?" Harry didn't just want to turn up unannounced.

"Of course I will." Hermione then looked round before placing the thin gold chain around both of their necks. Seconds later the corridor was empty.

Later that evening

Harry knocked on Severus' door. "Come in."

Harry pushed open the door and found his professor sitting alone. "Thank you for seeing me Professor."

"That's quite alright, Harry. What can I do for you?" Severus indicated that Harry should sit down.

"I think that Professor Jameson isn't who she says she is." Harry revealed.

Severus stood up. "Let's go into my study."

Harry followed Severus into the cozy room.

"What makes you suspect that she isn't who she says she is?" Severus charmed the room as he spoke.

"Because she's got a bite on her neck." Harry told his Professor.

"And?" Severus waited for Harry to join the dots for him.

"I had a nanny called Johanna when I was younger. She used to wear contact lens because she said she didn't like her eye color. Her eyes were amber. She also had a bad bite on her neck that a cat

gave her. Professor Jameson has the same color eyes and a bite in the same place.” Harry explained.

Severus couldn’t see why Harry was so bothered. “It might just be a coincidence. Why are you so concerned anyway?”

“Because one day Johanna just disappeared into thin air. Mum was really upset when she vanished. She even phoned the police to try and find her.” Harry told Severus.

“How long was she your nanny for?” Severus asked.

Harry thought back. “Ever since the twins were born, until a few years ago. The last time I saw her was when she said goodbye after taking us on holiday.”

Severus continued to question Harry about his former nanny. “Did she know that you were a wizard?”

Harry shook his head. “No, she was a muggle.”

“So you think that this Johanna masqueraded as a muggle for what, nine years, and that she is now hiding as Professor Jameson.” Severus sounded a little sarcastic as he spoke.

Harry didn’t respond as Severus continued. “If, as you claim, she is Professor Jameson, then why didn’t she make herself known to you when she found out that you were a wizard?”

Harry realized how ridiculous his supposition had been. “I’m being stupid aren’t I?”

“I think you are looking for something that isn’t there.” Severus spoke gently to Harry. “You lost someone you had been close to for all those years, and when you saw some similarities in Professor Jameson, you immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion.”

Harry stood up, looking a little embarrassed. “I’m sorry to have bothered you, Sir.”

Severus also stood. "Harry, why didn't you go to your father about this?"

Harry sighed. "We're still not speaking. We were supposed to have gotten together last Saturday but Dad had to go a teachers' meeting instead."

"Is that the only reason why?" Severus prodded.

"No, Sir. I still don't trust him." Harry admitted.

Severus placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Harry, you can always come to me, even after you sort things out with your father."

Harry felt relieved that he had an adult he could trust that he could turn to. "Thanks, Professor."

"I suggest you get back to your tower now. I imagine you have quite a lot of homework." Severus opened the door.

Harry smiled. "I do. A lot more than I imagined I would."

"Is Hermione coping okay?" Severus asked, knowing that his daughter wouldn't admit if she was struggling.

"Yes, Sir; she seems to be enjoying it." Harry thought his friend was actually reveling in the high volume of work that had already been piled on the two of them in the space of a few days.

"Good." Severus dismissed Harry and closed his door.

11 September 1993

Harry yawned as he finished his DADA homework. Despite the fact that his Dad was the teacher, he found himself being treated no differently than the other students, for which he was grateful. Checking the time, Harry realized that he was due to meet with his Dad in a couple of minutes.

Grimacing Harry got to his feet and called out to Dudley. "I'm going to go and see Dad."

"See you later then." Dudley waved. Harry had explained that he wanted to speak to their father about the Dementors.

Harry soon found himself standing in front of his Dad's office. Before he had a chance to knock, the door opened and he found himself face to face with his Dad. "I thought I heard footsteps."

Remus stepped aside to allow Harry entrance. "I've got us some butterbeers and some snacks from the kitchen."

Harry took a butterbeer from the tray and sat down. He had to admit that he felt very uncomfortable.

"Harry, look at me." Remus sat opposite Harry.

Harry looked up.

"I know that this must be difficult. I never meant for you to find out that things were so bad in the way that you did." Remus began tentatively. "I don't really know what you want to hear. Is there is anything you want to ask me? Anything you want me to tell you?"

Harry's first instinct was to lash out at Remus; to scream at him for what he had done to their family; to tell him that he hated him; he didn't want to ask Remus anything. After a long silence, however, Harry finally answered Remus, his voice barely audible. "Will you answer me honestly?"

"As honestly as I can." Remus promised.

"Do you still love us?" Harry knew how childlike he sounded; he couldn't help it, despite what Remus had done, Harry still needed Remus' reassurance that he cared about him.

"Harry, you, Dudley and the girls are my children. I will always be here for you all. No matter what happens between your Mum and me,

or you or me for that matter, I will always love you unconditionally.” Remus’ fervent tone comforted Harry.

“What about Mum? Do you still love her?” Harry asked, a little afraid of the answer.

“I’m sorry, but no I don’t.” Remus didn’t reveal that he’d never loved her.

Upset by his Dad’s response, Harry then asked about his Mum’s feelings. “Does she still love you?”

“I don’t know. I doubt it after what I’ve done to her.” Remus responded.

“Why did you do it?” Harry asked the question he had wanted to know the answer to all along.

Remus hesitated for a moment before answering. “Truthfully, I’ve been like this most of my life, even before I met your mother.”

“Does it have anything to do with your being a werewolf?” Harry wondered if Remus would pin the blame on his affliction.

“A little. When the full moon comes closer it gets more difficult to resist the temptation of seeking female company.” Remus took a mouthful of his butterbeer, grimacing slightly at the taste. “But the full moon is no excuse; I’ve strayed at other times of the month.”

“Why didn’t you just, err, you know with Mum?” Harry’s face burned bright red as he asked the question.

Remus had hoped that Harry wouldn’t ask him that. He could hardly tell his son that his mother was frigid and unadventurous in bed, and so he settled for a diplomatic answer. “Because my appetites are different from those of your mother’s.”

Harry didn’t say anything for a while, as he thought of what to ask next. “Are all men like you?”

Remus shook his head. "Definitely not. Just because I've done what I've have, doesn't mean that all men are that way."

Harry said nothing and refused to meet Remus' gaze. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry still said nothing.

"Are you afraid that you'll grow up to be like me?" Remus asked gently, after correctly deducing that Harry's question had something to do with his silence.

Harry just nodded.

"Why?" Remus asked.

Harry gulped. "I kissed Hermione."

"So?" Remus didn't immediately catch on to what Harry was worried about.

"She's engaged to someone else." Harry pointed out.

"Harry, you only kissed her, and besides you're both only thirteen. Hermione's engagement is going to be a long one, and one that might not last. What I did was a lot worse." Remus admitted to his son. "I was married and I not only treated your mother badly, but I've dragged all of you into my mess as well."

"But I kissed her again, even though I knew I shouldn't have." Harry admitted.

"What did Hermione do?" Remus asked.

"She told me she liked me but then suggested that we might be better off as friends." Harry replied.

"Have you done anything since then?" Remus enquired.

"No, of course not." Harry protested.

"Then you are not like me." Remus tried to convince Harry.

"But I want to do it again, even though I know I shouldn't." Harry looked miserable as he spoke.

Remus decided to be brutally honest with Harry; he wanted to try to get him to realize that a few kisses didn't make you an adulterer. "Harry, if I really want a woman, I will continue to pursue her until I get her, despite her objections."

"You mean that you'd make a woman sleep with you?" Harry sounded disgusted.

"I would never force myself upon a woman. Only a coward takes that approach." Remus tried to rephrase his previous comment. "What I actually meant is that I would pursue her, flatter her and generally wear down her objections, not that I would force myself upon her."

"But that still doesn't make it right, does it?" Harry asked.

"No, it doesn't. I've slept with both single and married women, some of whom were faithful to their husbands until I decided that I wanted them." Remus cringed as he realized how conceited he sounded.

"But they must have wanted to, otherwise they wouldn't have done it." Harry pointed out. "Hermione said she liked me kissing her. That means I must be like you."

Remus sighed heavily. Harry still wasn't getting it. "Harry, you didn't force your attentions on Hermione after she said she wanted to just to be friends. If I want a woman, she becomes almost like prey. I can be pretty unrelenting if I want someone."

Harry looked hard at Remus. He knew that most of the girls in his year were already mooning over his Dad, a few even going so far as to tell Harry what a 'hot' Dad he had. "But I still don't really understand why you chase other women when you have Mum."

Remus didn't really want to go into the particulars of the thrill of the chase with his son. "Harry, your Mum and I were never really compatible."

"Then why did you marry her?" Harry asked.

Remus was aware of how callous his response was going to sound. "Because it seemed like the right thing to do at the time."

Harry remembered Remus' earlier comments. "You said that you've always been like this. When you married Mum, were you intending to cheat on her?"

Remus answered honestly. "No, I had no intention of cheating on your Mum; it just turned out that way."

Harry felt a little better at Remus' answer. "Has Mum ever cheated on you?"

Remus shook his head. "Not as far as I know."

Harry had heard the arguments between his parents about Nia's friendship with Grimstock, so he was glad that his Mum's familiarity with Grimstock was as innocent as she had claimed it to be.

Remus knew what Harry was worrying about. "Harry, your Mum is a decent woman, and she deserves better than me. If she becomes more than friends with Lovegood, then I will be happy for her."

Harry was surprised at Remus' admission. "You're not bothered?"

"Harry, even though I don't love your Mum, I do care about her happiness. If she eventually decides that she wishes to remarry, then I will support her in her decision." Remus finished off his butterbeer, wishing he had something stronger.

Remus' words sparked a realization in Harry that he hadn't wanted to face until now. "You're going to get a divorce, aren't you?"

Remus nodded. "I've already moved out of Darcy Cottage. I've told your Mum she can keep it."

"Dad?"

Remus was glad that Harry had finally gotten back to calling him Dad instead of Sir. "Yes, Harry?"

"Can you take enough money out of my vault to pay for the Cottage?" Harry knew that his parents had refused to take his money, but under the circumstances Harry didn't want his Mum to have to struggle.

"I will still carrying on paying for the Cottage, Harry." Remus explained. "I wouldn't leave your Mum trying to make ends meet because of something that wasn't her fault."

"But I want to do it. Please?" Harry begged.

Remus knew that Nia wouldn't be happy about it and shook his head. "Harry, I can afford to pay for the Cottage. I don't have to pay any rent when I'm living at Hogwarts."

"But what about when the summer comes?" Harry asked.

"I'll sort something out." Remus still didn't how he'd manage. Even though he was enjoying his job at Hogwarts, it didn't pay nearly as well as his muggle position had.

Harry came up with a solution. "You can use my house in Grimmauld Square."

Remus found himself unable to speak. Despite what Remus done, Harry was still willing to help him. Turning away from Harry, Remus headed for his drinks cabinet and poured himself a scotch to give him some time to recompose himself. "Thank you, Harry."

Harry was pleased that his Dad had finally agreed to take something from him; even if it had resulted out of a situation that wasn't exactly ideal.

Remus took a mouthful of the scotch, shuddering slightly at the harsh but welcoming taste. "Is there anything else you want to ask me?"

Harry thought for a moment. "Are you seeing anyone else at the moment?"

Remus shook his head. "No, Harry. Most of my liaisons with women are short-lived."

"Do you think you'll ever get married again?" Harry asked hesitantly.

Remus' smile wasn't a happy one. "No."

Harry felt a little sad that his Dad didn't want to remarry. "Why not?"

"I was in love once but she rejected me. I never really loved anyone else after her." Remus looked a little lost in the past.

"Why did she reject you?" Harry wondered who Remus was talking about.

"I let her down. Unlike your Mum, she wasn't willing to forgive me time and time again, so she left me." Remus explained.

"Is she the real reason why you don't like women?" Harry enquired.

"Harry, I don't hate women." Remus laughed lightly at his son's misconception. "If a woman lets me know that she's interested, then I'm usually more than happy to share her company."

Harry thought about Remus' statement, and wondered how many times his father had actually cheated. "Did you cheat on Mum a lot?"

Remus knew Harry wasn't going to like his answer. "Yes, Harry. I have."

Harry felt angry at Remus' response, and snapped at his father. "Didn't any of them EVER say no?"

"Yes, of course they did." Remus responded.

Harry thought for a moment before asking his next question. "Have you ever regretted sleeping with someone?"

"A few times." Remus admitted.

Harry hadn't expected Remus to say yes. "But why?"

"Because, not counting your mother, I hurt someone I cared about." Remus refilled his glass before turning to face Harry again.

"Who did you hurt?" Harry frowned slightly as Remus took another mouthful of the scotch.

Remus knew he couldn't tell Harry about Johanna, and decided to tell him about his next biggest mistake. "Sirius - I slept with his fiancée."

Harry knew that Remus had dated Lily in school but he couldn't see how that could have hurt Sirius. "You don't mean Maman do you?"

Remus shook his head. "No, Harry I don't mean Lily. I slept with a girl called Eleanor whom Sirius had been engaged to since we were in school."

"What happened?" Harry was intrigued, despite his repugnance at what Remus had done.

"We went out for a few drinks while we waited for Sirius to get off work, and one thing led to another. The next thing I knew Sirius found us in bed together." Remus still couldn't remember leaving the bar with Eleanor, even now.

"What did he do?" Harry expected Remus to say that Sirius had kicked his ass.

"He told me to get out, so I did." Remus tossed off the remainder of the scotch in his glass.

"What happened to Eleanor?" Harry could tell from Remus' face that he wasn't going to like the answer.

“Sirius dumped her, so she hung herself in her parents’ backyard.” Remus refilled his glass yet again.

Harry felt sick. “She killed herself because of what you did?”

“No, Harry. Not because of what I did, because of what we both did.” Remus swirled the scotch around in his glass, resisting the temptation to finish it.

“How awful for Sirius.” Harry felt sorry for Sirius and for what Remus had put him through.

Remus didn’t tell Harry that Sirius hadn’t really given a damn what had happened to Eleanor after her betrayal of him. “Yes, but it’s a long time in the past. Sirius is happily married to Lily now.”

“Is that why you two didn’t speak to each for ages?” Harry asked, despite guessing it to be the case.

“It was.” Remus admitted.

Remus put his scotch to one side; he was drinking too much anyway. Remus knew that he had shared his psyche with Harry for long enough, and got down in front of his son. “While I like and respect the women I’ve been with, I’m not exactly concerned with their feelings afterwards.”

“It doesn’t exactly sound as if you respect them.” Harry observed.

“You really don’t believe I respect women do you?” Remus asked.

Harry twiddled his thumbs. “Err...”

“Harry, you can be totally honest with me, even if you think I won’t like what you are going to say.” Remus gave Harry a chance to say what he was really thinking.

Harry looked up, tears glistening in his eyes. "Honestly, no I don't think you do respect women. I think you treat women like shit, and that you never deserved someone like Mum. She's too good for you."

Harry hesitated, but Remus didn't respond; he knew that Harry needed to get this off his chest.

"You cheated on your own best friend. Sirius' girlfriend killed herself because you slept with her and got caught. How can you live with yourself? You're scum." By now Harry was screaming at Remus. "You're a selfish bastard who only thinks of himself, and I hate you."

Harry lashed out, his anger taking him over. Remus didn't move as Harry hit him again and again. "I hate you. I hate you."

Eventually Harry's anger blew itself out, and Harry collapsed into Remus' arms, sobbing loudly. Remus could hear his son's desperate chant amongst the sobbing. "I'm not like you. I'm not."

"You're not, Harry, you're not." Remus bent his own head and wept with his son, not for himself, but for what he had put Harry through.

Harry could feel Remus' body shaking as he sobbed with Harry. Harry wanted to tell him that it would be okay, but couldn't.

As Harry's sobs stilled, Remus wiped his own eyes and took Harry's hands in his own. "I don't expect you to forgive me for what I've done to your mother, but I would like for us to try and rebuild our relationship. I don't expect it to happen overnight, but I want you to know that when you're ready, I'll be waiting."

Harry didn't know if he wanted to, and hiccupped softly as he tried to speak. "I don't know, Dad."

Remus felt hurt at Harry's words but knew that he had brought this upon himself. His only sliver of comfort came from the fact that Harry still hadn't moved. Remus gently rocked his son, not wanting to lose contact with Harry. Soon it became aware that Harry had exhausted himself, and Remus found that he had fallen asleep. Picking him up, Remus carried him into his own bedroom and slipped him into bed.

Going back into his sitting room, Remus gradually worked his way down the scotch bottle before he charmed the room for silence, and then took out his self-loathing upon the room. Harry slept peacefully on, unaware of the rage and destruction being visited upon the room next door. After Remus had expended his anger, he collapsed in a heap and wept until he had no more tears to shed. Remus, as Harry had, then fell into an exhausted sleep.

The next day Harry got up early and walked into the remains of the sitting room. His Dad was fast asleep in the middle of the destruction. Not knowing what else to do, Harry slipped out, leaving Remus asleep on the floor of his sitting room.

It will probably be more than a week before the next chapter. I have started it, so I'll be working on it tomorrow and Wednesday. However, it's my wedding anniversary this Thursday, and we're going away for a long weekend.

Next chapter: Hermione has a talk with Harry; Dumbledore plots; we meet Auri's friends; Blaise/Ginny; Draco's disappointed; Severus gets a nasty shock.

Chapter 30: Surprises, Suppositions and Setbacks

14th September 1993

Severus was heading to speak with Madam Pomfrey when he spotted his wife ahead of him. He was about to call out to her, when she suddenly stopped outside Lupin's door. Wondering why she had stopped there, Severus immediately transformed and flew almost silently onto the rafter above her head.

He watched as she checked the corridor and then knocked on the door.

Remus was in the middle of marking some third year essays when a knock at the door startled him; he hadn't been expecting anyone. Sighing he got up, hoping that whoever it was wouldn't stay too long; he had a lot of essays to get through before tomorrow.

Pulling open the door, Remus was surprised to see an old friend standing there. "Virginie Lestrage, what are you doing here?"

"Aren't you going to invite me in, Remus?" Virginie laughed and threw herself into Remus' arms.

Remus caught the beautiful witch as she launched herself towards him. "I never thought I'd see you again."

Caught up in their embrace, neither saw the tiny bat fly down from the rafters and into Remus' quarters.

After gently disentangling Virginie's arms from around his waist, Remus put an arm around her shoulders and drew her into the room. "Can I get you something to drink?"

"Please, red wine, if you have it." Virginie answered Remus whilst looking around his quarters. "This room reflects your personality well."

Remus had decorated his room in a muted masculine style; dark woods and coffee colored furnishings with a splash of red provided by

a few throw cushions, which he had recently replaced after his debacle with Harry.

Remus poured the wine for Virginie and a scotch for himself. "What shall we drink to?"

"Old friends." Virginie immediately responded. Remus echoed her toast.

He laughed. "I can't believe how well you look. You've hardly changed at all."

Virginie shook her head. "Still a flatterer I see, Remus."

"It's not flattery when it's the truth." Remus still thought that Virginie was one of the most beautiful women he had ever met. "Is this meeting one of chance or did you look me up?"

"It's purely coincidental. I had no idea you were going to be coming to Hogwarts until a couple of months ago." She responded.

"And you waited until two weeks into the term to come to see me." Remus' tone was quite dry.

"I'm sorry. I wasn't sure if you would want to see me. It took me this long to get my courage up." Virginie looked a little rueful.

"No, I'm sorry. Tell me what have you been doing since we last met?" Remus sat down.

Up in the rafters, Severus was seething. His wife knew Lupin and hadn't told him? She knew how he felt about the werewolf. Why hadn't she said anything when he had ranted about Lupin becoming the new DADA teacher? Pulling away from his own thoughts, Severus returned his attention back to the conversation taking place below.

"I've been married twice, have four children and now live happily ever after." Virginie laughed.

“You make it sound like a fairytale.” Remus remarked.

“For me it is. After fleeing from my parents’ home, I never dreamt I would ever be this happy.” Virginie’s voice softened as she thought about her husband and children.

“What about the baby? What did you have?” Remus enquired.

“I had a beautiful daughter.” Virginie smiled proudly. “She’s a third year now.”

“Is she at Beauxbatons?” Remus asked.

Virginie shook her head, “No, she’s here at Hogwarts.”

Remus frowned; he knew that there weren’t any Lestranges at Hogwarts. Then he remembered that Virginie had said that she had been married twice. “Which House?”

“Slytherin.”

Remus tried to think of any of the girls in Slytherin who reminded him of Virginie and failed. “I give up, what’s her name?”

“Hermione.”

Remus nearly fell off his seat; Hermione was Virginie’s daughter! “You married Severus? But I thought he married a French Canadian witch.”

“That’s what we wanted everyone to believe. I could hardly advertise the fact that I was a fugitive on the run from You-Know-Who.” Virginie pointed out.

“I knew Hermione was Severus’ daughter but I never thought to ask about her mother when she came to stay.” To say that Remus was shocked was an understatement. “I still can’t believe you married him.”

Virginie's face took on a happy smile as she thought about Severus. "He is a wonderful husband and father. He married me and adopted Hermione. I never thought I would meet anyone I could ever love like this. Severus has taken good care of both of us. He considers Hermione to be not just his daughter, but also his heir." Virginie informed Remus.

Up in the rafters if the bat could have smirked, it would have. Severus knew that Lupin was trying to figure out why on earth such a breathtaking woman would have married him.

"How is that you managed to blend so well into the background?" Remus enquired. "Even though I know Hermione, I never once connected you to her and Severus.

"I only attended functions held abroad; I didn't really want my real identity splashed around in the Prophet." Virginie pulled a face as she mentioned the daily rag.

"Does anyone know who you really are?" Remus asked.

Virginie shook her head. "Apart from you and Dumbledore, no-one does."

"Dumbledore knows?" Remus frowned.

Virginie nodded. "It was he who arranged for my papers. Severus asked for his help. Is there a problem?"

Remus shook his head, unsure of whether to tell Virginie of Dumbledore's treachery, and decided against it at that time. "No, I was just surprised."

Virginie knew that there was more to it than that, but wisely held her tongue. "So what brings you here to Hogwarts to teach? Harry said you were happy teaching at a muggle school."

"I was, but I wanted to be closer to my children, so when the opportunity arose I took it." Remus explained.

"I can understand that. I'm so glad that I can be close to Hermione during the school year. I missed her terribly when Dominic was born and I had to stay at back at the Manor." Virginie smiled. "But at least I'm back here again now. I can keep an eye on my daughter once more."

"I'm glad that it has all worked out for you." Remus refilled his glass as he spoke. "But how did you manage once you left the flat?"

"I found a job at a dental clinic. The owner, Daniel Granger fell in love with me, and offered to marry me despite the fact that I was pregnant with another man's child. He accepted Hermione as his own daughter. He didn't ask any questions and I didn't offer any answers." Virginie looked lost for a moment.

"Where is he now?" Remus asked.

"He was killed in a deatheater attack when Hermione was one." Virginie didn't enlighten Remus as to Severus' part in the attack.

"I'm sorry." Remus sympathized. "That must have been tough on you. How did you meet Severus?"

"A chance meeting; it must have been fate." Virginie smiled lightly, glossing over the true details. "We were friends first, then we fell in love and were married almost a year to the day after we first met."

"He must have thought a lot of you to have made Hermione his heir." Remus observed.

"He did. He adored Hermione from the moment he first met her." Virginie answered truthfully.

"Does he know?" Remus quietly asked.

"Know what?" Virginie hedged.

"Who Hermione's real father is?" Remus asked gently.

"No." Virginie's response was quite sharp.

“Why didn’t you tell him?” Remus put down his scotch.

At this point Virginie burst into tears. Feeling like a heel, Remus got up and strode across the room to pull her into his arms. “I’m sorry.”

Virginie sniffled. “You know why I didn’t tell him. I couldn’t bear to have him look at Hermione as if she was some kind of monster. I just couldn’t do it.”

“How do you know he would look at Hermione that way?” Remus reasoned.

Virginie’s laugh was bitter. “One of the first things Severus told me about when we first got together was you. I know your curse isn’t your fault but Severus just doesn’t see it like that. He despises the darker side of our world. You should have heard the vitriol in his voice when he spoke about you. I couldn’t expose Hermione to that.”

Virginie pulled free of Remus’ embrace and sat back down.

Remus moved over to the window. “Why did leave when you did? I meant it when I asked you to marry me. I would have taken care of you and the baby.”

Virginie got up from the sofa and leant up against the windowsill. “I know you would have. But I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t tie you down. You were needed elsewhere.”

“I searched for three weeks after you left the flat. It was all the time I had left before I had to leave to go back to France.” Remus knew he should move but he was enjoying the sight of Virginie silhouetted against the window too much to do so.

“I changed my name, found a muggle job with Daniel, and basically blended into the background. I didn’t want you to feel responsible for us.” Virginie murmured softly.

“But I wanted to be responsible.” Remus snarled, and turned to face Virginie.

Virginie stepped back. "I know you did, but I did what I thought was for the best at the time."

Severus had heard enough. His beautiful wife had slept with the werewolf, and his precious daughter was in fact Lupin's daughter. Engaged in their conversation, the two occupants of the room didn't notice as Severus flew down from the rafters, and out of the open window.

"I'm sorry. I still wish you'd accepted my offer." Remus reiterated.

"Remus, the baby wasn't yours. She wasn't your responsibility; she was mine." Virginie shook her head. "That was why I left. I knew you wouldn't just let me leave."

"You were four months pregnant. What kind of a man would I be if I left a woman to deal with that kind of thing on her own?" Remus paced the floor as he spoke.

"You're a good person, Remus." Virginie put her hand on Remus' arm. "But it wouldn't have worked out between us."

"You were easy to be good to." Remus smiled at Virginie as he gently pushed her hair away from her face.

Virginie moved away and decided to change the subject. "I understand from Harry that things aren't going too well with you and your wife."

"We're actually getting divorced." Remus picked up his scotch and took a large mouthful.

Virginie wasn't surprised to find that things had gotten that bad for Remus. "Harry doesn't know, does he?"

Remus nodded. "Actually he does. We had a talk a few nights ago. Things didn't exactly go well though. He's not speaking to me anymore. I took the stupid option and decided to be brutally honest with him."

“Did you explain about what you felt you had lost; what you’re always looking for?” Virginia asked.

Remus smiled ruefully at Virginia. “Not exactly. I told him about Eleanor and Sirius.”

Virginia sucked in her breath. “Merlin, Remus. Are you mad? That was probably the worst thing you could have done.”

Remus shrugged his shoulders. “Probably, but it was time to be honest with myself as well as him. I know what kind of a life I’ve been leading, but I’ve been just too selfish to admit to it up until now. It’s cost me my family and my marriage.”

Virginia felt bad for her old friend; then again she knew exactly what he was like. During the time they had spent in the flat, Remus had often confided in her. “I wish you could have found someone to love.”

“I thought I had.” Remus took Virginia’s glass and refilled it for her.

“Who was she?” Virginia took the glass from Remus.

Remus pulled a wry face. “She was the children’s nanny, Johanna.”

“Did you sleep with her?” Virginia asked.

Remus nodded. “Just the once; I even marked her. But I mistook lust for love.”

“Are you sure?” Virginia still held out hope that Remus would find what he was looking for.

“Yes, I am. She disappeared, just like you did. I searched for her, but I think it was more the need for closure than anything else. She’s not the one I want.” Remus swallowed the remainder of liquid in his glass.

“Lily will never be yours; you know that don’t you?” Virginia knew that Remus had to face facts before he could move on. “From what Harry has told me, she is very happy with her husband.”

"I'm glad that she's happy." Remus returned to looking out of the window. "I'll always want her, but I'm enough of a realist to know that it's never going to be. So I'll just keep on doing what I do best."

"Woman after woman; full moon after full moon?" Virginie shook her head. "You can't go on like that forever."

"I won't ruin someone else's life as I did my wife's. I was back to my old ways the night after the marriage." Remus informed Virginie. "I think it's best if I stay single; there's no-one to hurt that way."

"Now you know why it would have never worked out between us." Virginie defended her decision to refuse Remus' offer of marriage. "You would have done the same to me."

"We'll never know." Remus answered. "But I'd like to think that it would have been different."

Virginie smiled brightly. "This is all water under the bridge now. I think it best if we forget all about what could have been, and work on renewing our friendship."

"Perhaps you're right. However, I think you had better make out that I'm a new friend, rather than old one with Severus. He wouldn't take it too well that you already know me." Remus smiled ruefully at Virginie.

"As much as it pains me to say this, I know he wouldn't understand." Virginie turned as if to head towards the door. "Remus, I've got to go."

Remus was surprised as she quickly spun around and pulled Remus' head down to hers before lightly kissing him on the lips, and hurrying from the room. Remus understood what the kiss meant; that they would only ever be friends, that she was sorry for leaving him, and that she wished him the best for the future.

The next day

Severus awoke to find himself in his bed in Snape Manor. He wondered how he had gotten there. Looking across the room he spotted Salty. "Did you place me in bed?"

The house elf nodded nervously. "Yes, Master Severus."

"That will be all." Severus lay back against his pillows as the elf disappeared. He knew that he had a class to teach that morning and needed to get up, but he almost couldn't bring himself to return to Hogwarts. He didn't know if he could face his treacherous wife just yet. He was still absolutely devastated by what he had heard the previous night. Virginie and the children were his life, and to find that he had been living a lie had hurt beyond anything else that he ever had to endure. Severus still couldn't believe what he had heard as he had hung upside down in the rafters above his wife's head.

After listening to as much as the conversation as he could stomach, Severus had left Lupin's room and flown back to the edge of the apparition boundaries surrounding Hogwarts. As soon as he was over them, he had transformed and apparated home. On arriving at the carriage house, he had proceeded to lay waste to everything in the room using the darkest magic he could conjure. Eventually, however, he had exhausted himself and had collapsed. Salty had obviously waited for him to wear himself out before transporting him here. Knowing he could not lie abed for much longer, Severus got up and walked over to the bureau on the far side of the room. Pulling out some parchment and picking up a quill, Severus began to write.

Harry was sitting in the library, reviewing his runes homework before breakfast, when a large black owl swooped in and landed next to him. Harry took the letter from its proffered leg and opened it.

"Mr. Lupin

Due to my workload, I regret that I will be unable to monitor your animagus lessons as promised. DO NOT attempt to continue them on your own.

Professor Snape"

Harry sighed heavily and put the letter down just as Hermione entered the room.

“Harry, I’ve just received a letter from Papa saying that he’s too busy to cover my animagus training.”

“So have I.” Harry held up his letter. “He warned me to not to try to do it on my own.”

“Me too.” Hermione admitted. “I don’t see why he couldn’t have told me though, instead of writing.”

“I don’t know either. He must be really busy if he can’t spare you a few minutes.” Harry observed.

“You’re probably right.” Hermione sighed even more heavily than Harry had done earlier.

Both children looked miserable at the thought of not being able to continue with their training. After a few minutes, however, Hermione suddenly sat up straight. “Harry, I’ve got an idea.”

“Your dad has already said we can’t practice on our own.” Harry thought Hermione was going to suggest that they ignore Severus’ warnings.

Hermione shook her head. “I wouldn’t dare do that. Papa would kill me. I was thinking about the mirrors.”

“What mirrors?” Harry didn’t know what Hermione was going on about.

“The ones Lily gave you. Can’t we contact her with your mirror, and see if she can continue our training that way?” Hermione suggested.

Harry’s face lit up. “Of course we can. I’ll try and speak to her when I go back to my room tonight.”

The two children now felt a lot happier than they had done a few minutes earlier.

Later that week

Virginie checked over the room; it looked perfect for Hermione's surprise birthday party. The only snag she had hit was with Severus. He had unexpectedly left for a conference on Friday evening, but had said that he would try and make it back for Hermione's birthday. However, she still hadn't heard anything more from him. Hermione's friends were all standing around the room chatting quietly when Virginie heard the outer door opening and motioned to them to be quiet. She watched as Hermione pushed open the dining room door to be met by screams of 'surprise'.

"Happy Birthday, Hermione." Virginie moved forward to hug her daughter.

Hermione smiled at her mother. "Thank you." She then looked round. "Where's Papa?"

"He's still at the conference he went to on Friday. He sent his apologies at not being able to get back in time." Virginie hid her anger at Severus' failure to return, and smiled brightly at her daughter. "He hopes to get back before the party ends."

Hermione was satisfied at her mother's answer, and turned to face her friends. "How did you manage to keep it a surprise?"

"That would be telling." Luna grinned at her friend. "Mrs. Snape arranged it all."

"Everyone, I've told you to call me Virginie." Virginie smiled at the children. "If you want to begin eating, I have one more visitor to attend to."

Hermione watched as her mother left the room; she had a feeling she knew who the extra visitor was. Sure enough, a few minutes later, Felidae came into the room and walked over to her.

"Happy Birthday, Hermione." Felidae gently kissed Hermione on the cheek, making her blush and Harry frown.

“Thank you Felidae.” Hermione smiled prettily at her fiancé.

Felidae held out a small gift which Hermione took and placed to one side. “You can open it now if you want to. I can’t stay as I need to get back to a meeting.”

“You came here just to drop this off?” Hermione asked.

Felidae nodded. “Yes, it is your birthday. Now, come on, open it.”

Hermione was well aware of Harry’s glowering face, but she couldn’t refuse to open the present without appearing churlish. The paper fell away to reveal a small box; inside it was a tiny representation of Crookshanks which mewed happily when Hermione picked it up. “Felidae, it’s beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like it.” Felidae smiled down at Hermione. “Would you walk me out?”

Hermione blushed slightly and moved to join Felidae, before turning around to face her friends. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

As soon as the door closed behind the two of them, Felidae turned to Hermione. “I understand from your mother that you and Harry are becoming pretty close.”

Hermione nodded. “I really like him but our engagement contract is coming between us.”

“If you want to tell him about the terms of the contract, then it’s fine with me.” Felidae told her. “I can still remember how it feels to find that perfect someone.”

“Thank you.” Hermione felt excited that she could finally be honest with Harry.

“Have a happy birthday, Hermione.” Felidae bent down and kissed Hermione on the cheek before striding out of the room.

Hermione happily ran back to join her friends.

24th September 1993

Albus stood up before the school and tapped gently on his wine glass. "I have an announcement to make."

Everyone fell silent and looked expectantly at the headmaster.

"Due to a recent sighting of Pettigrew in a nearby town, all Hogsmeade visits will be cancelled under further notice." Albus waited for the backlash that he knew would come after his announcement.

A loud moaning and complaining soon filled the room which was soon put to rest by a sharp reprimand of 'silence' from Minerva. "If you would all be so good as to be quiet, the headmaster hasn't finished speaking yet."

Albus turned to his deputy. "Thank you Minerva." He then turned his attention back to the disgruntled children. "To make up for the disappointment, we will be holding a Yule ball on 17th December. Every year will be invited to attend with curfews in effect for first to third years, unless you are attending with a fourth year or above."

Hermione listened happily to the news. She still hadn't told Harry about her and Felidae's conversation yet but she hoped he'd agree to go with her after she told him.

A little further up the Slytherin table from where Hermione sat, Aurilia looked across to the Ravenclaw table and sighed.

Astoria Greengrass turned to see where Aurilia was looking. "Auri, you've got no chance. You need to stop mooning over Draco Black."

Auri frowned. "I know. That cow Parkinson already has her claws into him."

Katherine De Montfort shook her finger at Auri. "It's not nice to call people names, Auri."

"I know, I know. I just really like Draco." Auri sighed again. She'd been enamored of the third year Ravenclaw ever since she first met him, and had been unable to get him out of her head.

"Anyway." Katherine continued. "He's hardly going to date one of us. He's a third year."

"Pity." Astoria looked across to the Ravenclaw table. "I think Auri's brother is gorgeous."

"Which one?" Katherine asked.

"Harry. Those green eyes and that long black hair. He's gorgeous." Astoria imitated her friend and sighed, before turning to Katherine. "Anyone you like?"

Katherine shook her head but not before looking across to where Blaise Zabini was talking to his girlfriend. "No."

Auri caught the look. "I shouldn't even go there. You know what a bitch Prewett can be. I wouldn't mess with her boyfriend."

Katherine blushed. "I really don't like him."

Auri and Astoria exchanged glances. "We believe you."

The boy in question was currently asking Ginny if she'd like to attend the ball with him. "Of course, Blaise. Who else would I go with except my wonderful boyfriend?"

Blaise grinned. "No-one."

Ginny fluttered her eyelashes at her boyfriend. "Good, that's settled then."

Blaise turned away from Ginny and let the smile drop from his face. He really liked Ginny but sometimes her blatant flirting annoyed him. His mother, however, had been delighted with her, and had told Blaise that Ginny would make the perfect wife for him. Blaise hadn't

been too impressed; he felt that despite some families' propensities towards early engagements, he didn't want to follow the same path. His mother had soon disabused him of his notions.

New Year's Eve 1992

"Blaise, I'd like to see you in my rooms." Arabella Zabini looked pointedly at her son who was quietly talking to one of her friend's daughters in a dark corner of the ballroom.

Sighing, Blaise excused himself and followed his mother out of the room.

On entering her suite of rooms, Arabella closed the door behind her son. "Blaise, while Ginevra is a guest in our house, I expect you to pay her the respect she deserves. Do you understand?"

Blaise squirmed under his mother's stare. "Yes, Mother."

"Good. I don't expect to see you openly flirting with Madeline Grosse again this evening." Arabella sat down. "I don't want you to ruin your chances with Ginevra as I think she will make you a fine wife."

Blaise blanched. "But I..."

"...will do as you are told if you wish to inherit the Zabini fortune." Arabella's voice took on a hint of steel as she spoke. "I mean to see this family move forward, and as you are my only heir, I want to see you married to a pureblood witch of good standing. Despite my dislike of Ginevra's mother, Ginevra has proven herself to be up to my standards. She reminds me a little of myself."

Blaise just hoped that Ginny wasn't so like his mother that she felt the need to imitate his mother's habit of procuring money and husbands. "But you hardly know her."

"I've seen enough to convince me. On her thirteenth birthday, I will send the requisite marriage contract to her mother." Arabella had found Ginny to be quite delightful. She knew the girl had a mean streak; Blaise's tales of her willingness to tackle the Boy Who Lived

had proved that. This was to Ginny's advantage; Blaise could be a little strong willed and needed someone who was capable of bringing him to task when it was required. Arabella had also taken the precaution of casting a fertility spell on the girl which had indicated that Ginny was both fertile and a good match for Blaise.

Blaise pulled a face. "Do I have to be tied down at such an early age?"

"You've known what I've expected from you since you first started school." Arabella pointed out.

"I know, but to remain faithful to one witch for all my life?" Blaise shuddered at the thought.

"Blaise, what you do once you are married is up to you." Arabella had taken many lovers during her seven marriages, and would continue to do so for as long as she was able. "However, until your engagement is settled, I expect you to follow my wishes, and focus your attention on Ginevra."

Blaise kissed his mother's hand. "Mother, I will of course acquiesce to your wishes."

Arabella graced her son with a smile. "I thought you might. You may return to the dance now. Please ensure you keep your intended at your side."

Blaise bowed slightly and left the room.

Arabella checked her reflection, before leaving the room and following her son back down to the ballroom.

Present time

Blaise remembered his mother's words and decided that what she didn't know wouldn't hurt her. He therefore smiled lazily at Isobella Porter, and then left the room. Isobella waited for a few minutes before picking up her bag and walking out as well. Ginny was busy talking to her friends and didn't notice.

Isobella jumped as Blaise's hand grabbed her by the arm. "Isobella, what brings you out here?"

"I don't know what you mean." Isobella responded coyly.

Blaise pulled her into the empty classroom and pushed the girl up against the wall. Despite their age difference, Blaise was much taller. Isobella knew that Prewett was dating him, but she hoped that Blaise would eventually dump her. "I think you do."

Isobella was thrilled by Blaise's attention. "So, who are you going to the ball with?"

Blaise laughed. "Who do you think I'm going with?"

Isobella knew then that he had asked Ginny, and made to move away from him.

"Where do you think you're going?" Blaise grabbed Isobella by the arm.

"You've got no real interest in me. Prewett is obviously your girlfriend." Isobella hissed.

"But I'm very interested in you." Blaise answered truthfully. "My mother is the one who is encouraging my relationship with Ginny. She sees her as my future wife."

"And you don't?" Isobella asked despite herself.

Blaise shook his head. "I'm more interested in you. I thought I made that obvious."

Isobella felt her heart race. She really liked Blaise even though she knew he was off limits. "Perhaps."

Blaise let her go. "Meet me here tonight at ten."

Isobella shook her head. "I can't. I've got astronomy then."

Blaise hid his disappointment. "I'll see you around then." Blaise then turned to leave the room.

"Blaise, I can meet you tomorrow, if you want to." Isobella suggested, not wanting to let Blaise slip away.

"I'll let you know." Blaise then coolly walked out of the room.

Later that week

Severus stood over the cauldron watching the potion shimmer and bubble. In his hand he clutched a small tube; the silver suspended in the liquid glistened in the flickering candlelight which lit up the dungeon. He knew that if he was to pour just a few drops of the liquid into the finished Wolfsbane, which currently sat in the cauldron in front of him, it would be enough to finish off the werewolf.

Knowing, however, that he wouldn't do it, Severus pocketed the silvery liquid and proceeded to apportion the potion in the cauldron into three containers; one for each night up until the full moon. Calling for Salty, he ordered the house elf to take the first container full to Lupin; he knew he couldn't deal with being alone with the man who had fathered his daughter.

Two weeks later

Harry heard footsteps and looked up to see Draco walk into their room. "How did it go?"

Draco shook his head and sat heavily on his bed. "I lost the match for us."

Harry hid his disappointment. "You can't win every time, Draco."

"But this was my first match as official seeker, and I let Potter get to the snitch first." Draco sounded disgusted.

“What happened?” Harry sat up and pushed the book he had been reading from aside. He had a lot of reading to do and had been too busy to attend the quidditch match.

“I was hovering above our goal when Jordan suddenly screamed that Potter had spotted the snitch. I didn’t even see it. It was all over within a few seconds.” Draco kicked his bedpost.

“What was the score?” Harry asked.

Draco pulled a face. “160 to 130.”

Harry let out a small sigh of relief. “It’s not that bad. We only dropped 30 points.”

“But that’s not the point. You wouldn’t have missed the snitch.” Draco whined.

“What’s bothering you more; the fact that you missed the snitch, or the fact that it was my brother who got it?” Harry enquired.

“Both.” Draco admitted. “You should have seen the look on Potter’s face when he realized that I couldn’t get there in time.”

“And you would have been the same if it had been you to reach the snitch first.” Harry pointed out.

“It doesn’t matter anyway. I’ve resigned and offered to move back to reserve.” Draco told Harry.

Harry tried to get Draco to change his mind. “It was only one bad game, Draco.”

Draco shook his head. “I’m a better chaser than seeker. I’m sorry, Harry, but the position is yours again.”

Harry swore silently. He could have done without having to contend with quidditch on top of everything else. “If that’s what you want, then I don’t have much choice.”

Draco got up. "We need to win the next game. Apparently Slytherin has a new seeker who's really great. I can't take the chance that I'll come good."

"I understand." Harry knew Draco was right. "Sorry Draco, but you'll have to excuse me; I really need to get this chapter read before tomorrow."

Draco nodded and walked out of the room. He knew Harry wasn't happy but he also knew that if he stayed in the seeker position, he wouldn't be doing the team any favors.

18th October 1993

Peter sat in the cavern, assessing his wounds. It had been more than a month since he had tried to speak to Remus. Unfortunately the rendezvous hadn't gone exactly as he had envisaged.

1 September 1993

Remus had portkeyed into the Shrieking Shack to find a goblet of Wolfsbane waiting for him. He'd been taking it for several days already in preparation for the change. Quickly swallowing it, Remus grimaced at the foul taste, and stripped off his clothes. He had soon learned it was better to go through the change naked whenever possible in order to preserve his clothing. Remus was aware of the exact moment that the full moon began its ascension into the night sky, as his body began to ripple and distort as his limbs lengthened, muscles stretched and hair began to grow at an incredible rate all over his body. Unable to help himself, Remus screamed out loud. No matter how many times he went through the process, the pain never seemed to lessen. Eventually, a large werewolf stood in Remus' place, panting heavily.

After walking around the room for a while and unable to find any way to escape, it finally settled down on the huge rug that ran the length of the shack in front of a boarded-up fireplace. Suddenly the werewolf heard a scampering sound coming along the passageway. Sniffing it caught the scent of another animal. Dimly in the back of its mind, it recognized the scent; Wormtail.

Peter entered the room, squeezing through a small crack in the wood; for once grateful for his diminutive size. As he slipped through the crack he spotted the werewolf lying in the corner. If Peter hadn't known about the slight differences between a werewolf and a wolf, he might have presumed it a common wolf. Warily the small rat approached the werewolf, which up until now hadn't moved. As the minutes passed and the werewolf still hadn't moved, Peter decided to take a chance and transform.

"Can you understand me?" Peter asked, his voice a little shaky. He had half expected Remus to attack him.

The werewolf did nothing but watch and listen.

"Please Remus, I need your help." Peter begged. "I didn't do it. I didn't betray James."

If Peter had taken a split second longer to transform, the werewolf would have been able to clamp its powerful jaw around his arm, as it let out a bloodcurdling growl and leapt at the small man who quickly disappeared from sight. Angry at losing its prey, the werewolf looked around on the floor, and spotted the small animal trying to flee towards the same spot it had entered the room. Easily covering the short distance, the werewolf reached out with its large front paw and swatted at the rat, sending it flying in the air towards the other end of the room.

The small rat hit the wall with a small crunch, and fell unhindered onto the floor, blood pouring profusely from a wound on its head. The werewolf watched almost lazily as the rat once again made a bid for freedom, its claws scrabbling for purchase on the blood slicked floor. Just before it reached the exit it was seeking, the werewolf pounced once more, sending the flying across the room yet again.

The little rat hit the floor, shaking itself as it tried to clear its head. Dimly Peter understood that the werewolf was playing with him, almost taunting him to make a move. He also knew that Remus was cognizant of exactly who he was, and that he was going to make him pay for what he thought Peter had done.

The werewolf was now slowly moving forward inch by inch, backing the rat up against the wall. As the rat felt the rough texture of the wood against its tail, it also felt a small opening. As quick as a flash it spun round and prayed that the opening would be big enough; it was. As it fell to the ground outside, it could hear the werewolf trying to rip the wall apart in pursuit of him. Unable to get out, the werewolf screamed its frustration to the night.

The next morning Remus limped out of the Shrieking Shack and, instead of heading up to the infirmary to get his wounds cleaned up, he headed for Dumbledore's office instead.

"Remus, what brings you here? I thought you'd be in the infirmary recovering." Albus waved at Remus to sit down.

"I had a visitor last night." Remus told the headmaster.

Albus immediately sat up. "Who?"

"Pettigrew. He was actually stupid enough to try and reason with me." Remus snorted.

"Is he dead?" Albus asked.

Remus shook his head. "He somehow managed to evade me."

"Damn." Albus swore. He had hoped that Remus had dealt with the man. "Did he say why he was there?"

"He tried to, but I didn't give him a chance." Remus explained.

Albus relaxed. "If you see him again, please let me know at once."

Remus nodded, and left Albus' office.

Albus wondered why Pettigrew would seek Lupin out. Albus knew he would have to be careful. It wouldn't do for Pettigrew and Lupin to get together, despite the fact that Lupin was still under his control. If he

came across Pettigrew first, he would have to put him out of his misery.

Present time

Peter had been worried that he'd been infected by Remus during their scuffle in the Shrieking Shack but the new full moon had come and gone without any change. Unfortunately for him, the injuries he'd sustained had included a broken arm, which without a wand he had been unable to attempt to mend, meaning that he had had to try to splint it in the muggle way. He was glad that it now appeared to be almost healed. Changing back from a rat into his human form had been horrendously painful as the bone split and stretched into human shape; Peter had a feeling that he had hadn't helped the break any during the transformation. Now, however, he had a purpose and he quickly changed into his rat form and disappeared from the cave.

Meanwhile, in Hogwarts, Harry wasn't looking forward to his DADA lesson and had to be practically dragged to the lesson by Hermione. Since his showdown with his Dad the previous month, he'd gotten by in the lessons by just simply putting his head down, and only answering when called upon.

Remus looked up as Harry came into the room; he could see that Harry was still avoiding his eyes. He waited until the entire class had made its way into the room before addressing them. "Today we are going to have a practical lesson. I've a wardrobe at the back of the classroom that has been moved from the staff room for this lesson."

Everyone looked at the wardrobe unimpressed. They couldn't see why a wardrobe was necessary. Suddenly it rattled, startling the class.

Remus hid his smile. Up until now, his lessons had been purely theoretical, and he knew that the children were beginning to get restless. He'd had Filch track down a Boggart for him; which the loathsome caretaker had begrudgingly done.

"Does anyone have any idea what is in there?" Remus asked.

Ron Prewett put his hand up. "It's not a spider is it, Sir?"

Remus shook his head. "It's not, Ron. Anyone else?"

Nobody put their hand up so Remus decided to tell them. "The wardrobe contains something called a boggart. Can anyone tell me what a boggart is?"

Hermione and Draco both put their hands up. Remus called on Draco, making a few of the Slytherins grumble under their breaths.

"It's a creature that feeds on your worst fear, changing shape to assume that worst fear." Draco explained.

"Five points to Ravenclaw." Remus smiled. "So, the boggart is a shape-shifter. Can anybody else tell me anything about it?"

Hermione put her hand again; this time Remus called on her. "It prefers to lurk in dark spaces, such as that wardrobe. It can be gotten rid of by the use of the spell 'riddikulus'."

"Well done, Hermione. Five points to Slytherin." Remus noticed the Slytherins looked a little surprised at his awarding points to one of their classmates. "As Hermione correctly stated, the spell 'riddikulus' will help to combat the boggart. However, because the boggart will have assumed what you fear most, you need to imagine it as something amusing to you, while at the same time casting the spell. Laughter is a boggart's enemy. Now, I need a volunteer."

The entire class proceeded to look anywhere but at their teacher. Remus was surprised that Hermione hadn't stepped forward; usually the girl was first to volunteer. To prove that he was going to continue not to show favoritism to his own children, Remus's gaze fell on his son. "Dudley, if you'd like to step forward."

Neville let out the deep breath he'd been holding. Usually the teachers picked on him so he was pleased that Professor Lupin had chosen his friend instead.

Dudley stepped nervously forward.

“Now Dudley, don’t forget the incantation, and the wand movement is like so.” Remus demonstrated as he spoke, and then turned to the class. “I’d like you all to copy this.”

The voices of all the children mingled together as they flourished their wands while reciting ‘riddikulus’. Remus turned to the class. “Please line up. Once Dudley deals with the boggart, I want you to step up one by one, and face the boggart.” Remus then returned his attention to Dudley. “Are you ready?”

Dudley swallowed hard and nodded. Remus opened the door to the wardrobe and a large fire-breathing dragon flew out. Dudley hurried to get the spell out while the class watched. Dudley’s dragon was soon transformed into a water-drenched stuffed dragon, its fire now a pathetic wisp of smoke. Dudley stepped back, relieved to have gotten his part over.

Ron stepped forward and the dragon transformed into the largest spider anyone in the class except for Remus had ever seen; the accompanying cracking noise making Ron and several of his classmates start in fright. Remus now knew why Ron had asked about whether there had been a spider in the wardrobe. “Riddikulus.” Remus watched as the monstrous spider turned into a tiny spider with pink wings which flew towards the next person in the line.

One by one the class tackled the boggart until it reached Harry. Harry swallowed hard as the cross-dressing image of Hermione’s father changed first into Luna lying dead on the floor, her blonde hair coated in blood, body distorted into angles that could never have been achieved naturally before transforming into a Dementor, causing Harry to collapse to his knees.

Remus stepped forward in front of the Dementor causing it to transform into a silvery orb which was forced to change into a singing and dancing Edam cheese at Remus’ casual incantation of the word ‘riddikulus’. He burst out laughing at the image and repeated the spell once more. At his second incantation, with a large cracking sound, the boggart disappeared.

Remus immediately turned to check on Harry who was kneeling on the floor breathing heavily. "Class dismissed." Harry attempted to regain his footing. "Harry, please remain where you are."

Jamie, who had been at the back of the line, heaved a sigh of relief that he hadn't had to face the boggart. After what he had envisioned on the train, he had a fairly good idea of what the boggart would have changed into.

Remus stepped over to Harry, easily lifting him up off the floor and placing him on a chair. Remus then pulled out a bar of chocolate, offering it to Harry, who gratefully took a few pieces. The same effect as on the train took over Harry's body, driving away the effects of the faux Dementor.

"Harry, do you know why you saw Luna like that before the boggart changed into a Dementor?" Remus asked.

"No, Sir." Harry refused to meet Remus' eyes.

Remus sighed heavily. "Harry, I'm a little concerned. This is the second time you've had an episode involving Luna. I would like to try to something with you. It's called Legilimency."

Harry shook his head. "No, Sir."

"So you know what it is then?" Remus was surprised as the subject wasn't usually covered until seventh year.

Harry nodded. "I've read about it."

Knowing what a bookworm his son was, Remus wasn't surprised. "Please Harry, I think it's important to get to the bottom of this."

Harry again shook his head. "No, Professor. I don't want you poking around in my head."

Remus hid his hurt at Harry's brusque tone and form of address. "Very well, Harry. You may go to lunch. If you feel unwell today, then please report to Madam Pomfrey."

"Yes, Sir." Harry got up and almost ran out of the room.

Harry ignored Hermione, Dudley and Draco who were all waiting for him outside the classroom and disappeared into the first boys' bathroom he came to. Once inside a stall, Harry collapsed to his knees and vomited again and again. As he did so, he became aware of a hand rubbing his back, and the quiet murmur of voices. Only once his stomach was completely empty did he sit back onto the floor. A glass was pushed into his hand. "Drink this slowly."

Harry took the glass of water that Dudley had passed to him. "Thanks."

"We'll be out in a minute." Dudley told Hermione and Draco, who both reluctantly left the bathroom, leaving Dudley alone with his brother.

"Harry, I don't know what's happening with you and Luna, but I want you to know that I'm here for you." Dudley gruffly told his brother.

Harry felt tears threaten at Dudley's words. He hadn't expected his brother to react so well to what had happened. "Thanks, Dud. I don't know either." Harry looked up at Dudley for the first time since his latest vision. "You know that I don't fancy Luna don't you?"

Dudley nodded. "Of course I do. If you had you would have gone out with her when she asked you. Besides I know you really like Hermione."

Harry blushed. "How did you know that?"

Dudley snorted. "It's pretty obvious to me. You're always looking at her when you think she isn't looking."

"Do you think anyone else has noticed?" Harry looked worried.

Dudley shook his head. "I doubt it. I just know you pretty well."

Harry let out a sigh of relief. "Good."

"Is there something going on that I don't know about?" Dudley asked.

Harry nodded. "I kissed her when I stayed at her house at the end of the holidays."

Dudley grinned and punched Harry in the arm. "Go Harry."

Harry shook his head. "We're just friends. She's got a fiancé, Dudley, in case you'd forgotten. Remember the guy who showed up at her birthday party."

"Oh yeah, I had." Dudley stood up. "Sorry Harry."

Harry climbed unsteadily to his feet. "It's okay. I've enough on my plate at the moment with quidditch now that Draco has stepped down, the extra electives I'm taking, and my animagus training with Maman."

"I'm glad I'm not you." Dudley hadn't been interested in the animagus lessons when Harry had told him about them. Taking muggle studies and care of magical creatures was enough for him.

"Sometimes I wish I wasn't me." Harry finally cracked a small smile. "I'm going to get some fresh air." Harry moved towards the door and stopped to look back at Dudley. "Thanks, Dudley."

"No problem, Harry." Dudley was happy that his brother had regained his color again.

Harry left the room noticing that Hermione and Draco had disappeared, and headed for the door which led outside.

Hermione was leaning against the wall on the other side of the door. "Harry."

"How did you know that I wouldn't go straight to lunch?" Harry asked.

"I didn't; I just took a chance." Hermione looked nervous. "Harry can I talk to you about something?"

Harry nodded a little resignedly. As much as he cared about Hermione, he had really wanted some time to himself. "Let's go sit in the enclosed garden."

Hermione followed Harry and both of them sat down on a bench. "Harry, you remember on my birthday when I walked Felidae to the door?"

Harry nodded curtly.

Hermione continued. "He told me then that it's okay to tell you about our engagement contract."

"What about it?" Harry asked.

"The contract allows both of us to date other people." Hermione smiled happily at Harry.

"You mean to say that Venant is alright with your seeing me?" Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing.

Hermione nodded. "Yes."

"What about your wedding; is it still happening?" Harry casually asked.

"Yes it is." Hermione told him.

"So basically what you're saying is that it's okay to date me because Venant and your contract allow it, but that you're still going to marry him?" Harry asked Hermione for clarification.

"Pretty much." Hermione then proceeded to fill Harry in on another of the contract's terms. "Harry, my contract with Felidae also has another loophole clause. If I don't want to marry him before my eighteenth birthday, then I can just rescind the contract."

"So not only are you free to date other people but you don't actually have to marry this man unless you want to." Harry once again looked to Hermione for confirmation of the facts.

“Yes.” Hermione sounded hesitant. Harry didn’t look that happy.

“You mean to tell me that all the time I was feeling bad about kissing you, you knew that you were free to date other people, and that you didn’t have to marry Venant if you didn’t want to.” Harry’s voice had gone deathly quiet.

“Yes, but I promised my parents that I wouldn’t disclose the terms of the contract to anyone. I also wanted to check that Felidae didn’t mind about you knowing.” Hermione smiled brightly at Harry. “So, if you want to, we could go to Yule Ball together.”

Harry stood up. “I don’t think so.”

“But...” Hermione’s voice faltered.

“Hermione, I really do like you. But do you honestly think that I could see you while you are engaged to someone else? I don’t care if he knows about it; it still doesn’t make it right.” Harry couldn’t believe that Hermione would believe that he would do it, particularly after he had told her about some of what had happened between him and his Dad. “It’s not just that. You knew how awful I felt about my cheating with you on your fiancé, and you still didn’t tell me about the contract, despite the fact that you could have told me that day at the lake.”

Hermione hung her head. “But I didn’t want to tell you until I checked with Felidae and my parents.”

Harry felt sick. “I can’t believe you made me go through that when you could have told me.”

Hermione tried to explain. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you before, but I couldn’t just tell you without asking first; I would have betrayed both my parents’ and Felidae’s trust.”

Harry was angry at what Hermione had put him through. “I understand that but you knew how I felt about what I’d done.”

“I told you, I needed to...” Hermione was cut off by Harry.

“But Venant told you on your birthday. That was a month ago, Hermione.” Harry pointed out.

“The time was never right. We never seemed to be alone.” Hermione defended herself.

“You could have asked to speak to me alone.” Harry shook his head. “But you didn’t.”

Hermione knew Harry was right. “Harry, I’m sorry. Please, we can be together now.”

“But if I start dating you, even if your fiancé knows, I would become just like my Dad.” Harry refused to compromise his morals again.

“You’re nothing like your Dad. Felidae knows and he is more than happy that I like you.” Hermione argued.

Harry shook his head once more. “My Mum knew, but that still didn’t make it right.”

“Harry this is totally different. Please.” Hermione pleaded.

“It doesn’t matter. I just can’t.” Harry knew he was going to hate himself for upsetting Hermione, but he needed to stop things before they got any worse. “I think you were right about our just being friends.”

“If that’s what you want.” Hermione struggled hard not to cry at Harry’s words.

Harry desperately wanted to change his mind at Hermione’s distress but knew that he couldn’t. Hardening his resolve, Harry answered Hermione. “It is.”

“Excuse me.” Hermione got up and rushed out of the garden.

Harry sat back down and put his head into hands. The next thing he knew a hand had clamped down over his mouth, and another had wrapped itself around him. Struggling, Harry reached down for his

wand, which he had placed on the bench beside him, only to find it missing. A voice hissed in his ear. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Harry ignored the promise and struggled even harder. The voice spoke again. "Petrificus Totalus."

Harry now found himself totally unable to move. Peter stepped in front of Harry. "I'm sorry to have to do that but I need you to listen. I want you to talk to Remus for me. Tell him that Peter needs to speak to him about the night your parents were attacked by You-Know-Who."

Peter released just Harry's mouth from the spell. "Why the hell should I tell him? You murdered a man."

Peter shook his head. "I didn't kill James."

"You may not have held the wand, but you gave him up to You-Know-Who." Harry snarled at the revolting looking little man.

"I didn't do it." Peter protested.

"You owned up to it." Harry pointed out.

"I know, but I also know that I didn't do it. Please Harry, tell Remus the next time he sees me to listen to what I've got to say." Peter looked up as the sound of footsteps began to echo in the hallway. Harry watched incredulously as the man dropped his wand and disappeared. From his vantage point on the floor, Harry couldn't work out where Peter had gone to.

Remus appeared at the entrance to the garden and quickly spotted Harry lying immobile on the floor. "Harry, are you alright?" Remus dashed across to his son.

"Pettigrew, he was here. He used petrificus on me." Harry told his Dad.

Remus released Harry from the spell and gave his son his wand back. "What did he want?"

“To talk to you. He said that even though he owned up to giving James Potter up to You-Know-Who, he knows he didn’t do it. He said that the next time he sees you he wants you listen to what he has to say.” Harry explained.

Remus thought for a moment before looking around. “Harry, you can’t tell anyone about what happened here just now.”

Harry looked incredulously at his father. “But why not?”

“Please, Harry, just trust me.” Remus begged.

“Why should I?” Harry knew he sounded belligerent but he didn’t care.

Remus reasoned with Harry. “Harry, if Peter risked coming into Hogwarts to speak to you, there must have been a good reason. He had your wand, and didn’t kill you.”

Harry weighed up what his Dad had said. Why hadn’t Peter killed him when he had the chance? “Okay, but if he comes back again, then I’m going to tell someone.”

“Thank you Harry.” Remus sat down. “Harry, won’t you please come and talk to me about what’s happened between us?”

Harry shook his head and backed off. “I can’t yet.”

“I understand.” Remus got up and waited for Harry to join him at the doorway.

“Sir?” Harry asked.

Remus winced at Harry’s formal address. “Yes, Harry.”

“Why did you come out here?” Harry asked.

Remus enlightened his son. “After what happened in the classroom I was worried when I didn’t see you at lunch. Draco told me that Hermione was waiting out here for you. When I saw Hermione

running up the corridor in tears, I wanted to make sure that you were alright.”

“Thank you.” Harry was glad that his Dad had come along.

“Harry, what happened with you and Hermione?” Remus asked, wanting to keep Harry talking to him.

“I don’t think it’s any of your business.” Harry responded.

Remus felt a spark of anger. “Harry, you may not wish to talk to me, but I still expect you to show me some respect.”

Harry knew that he was pushing his father too far. “Sorry, Sir.”

Remus changed tack. “Harry, please tell me. Perhaps I can help.”

Harry knew that Remus couldn’t but told him anyway. “Hermione told me that her marriage contract with Venant is open-ended. He’s said that she can date me if she wants to. I told her that despite that, I couldn’t go out with her.”

“Why not?” Remus asked. He didn’t mention that he was aware of the terms of the contract. He knew that if Harry found out, it would make things even worse between the two of them.

“Hermione’s fiancé might think that it’s okay to cheat while you’re engaged to someone if you are both aware of the cheating, but it’s not for me. Because if I did date Hermione, it would make me like you, and that’s the last thing I want to be.” With that parting blow, Harry walked off leaving Remus reeling.

Next chapter: Things with Harry and Hermione go from bad to worse; Nia and Remus talk; Jamie falls out with Harry; Lily has an admirer.

Chapter 31: Love Hurts

Note: Hermione is NOT Remus' daughter. Severus just believes she is, as he flew out of the room before Virginie revealed that Remus is not the father.

October 25th 1993

Remus opened his door to find Dumbledore standing there. "Is there a problem, Headmaster?"

Albus shook his head. "No. May I come in?"

Remus stepped back to allow Albus entrance to his sitting room. "Can I offer you some tea?"

Albus accepted and waited for Remus to finish pouring it before bringing up the subject he had come to discuss. "I am a little concerned about the safety of the Shrieking Shack, particularly in light of your sighting of Pettigrew there."

"But I didn't see him there last month." Remus pointed out.

"That may be so, but on reflection I have decided that it might be better if we used an alternative location for your next few transformations." Albus sipped from his cup, carefully gauging Remus' reaction.

Remus shrugged. "It doesn't make any difference to me. As long as there is somewhere comfortable for me to lie down during the night, and I can't escape, then anywhere will do."

Albus relaxed. Obviously Lupin wasn't planning to make contact with Pettigrew. "Do you remember the small cottage on the Dorset coastline?"

Remus nodded. The cottage had served as a prison for the deatheaters they had managed to round up during the first war against Voldemort, before they were transported to Azkaban. "Will it be strong enough to stop me from escaping though?"

"I've already seen to its reinforcement. I will provide you with a portkey which will take you there before the full moon and I have altered the wards to the school to allow you to portkey directly to the hospital ward afterwards." Albus picked up a cookie and dunked it into his tea while he waiting for Remus' response.

"I'll collect the portkey on the morning of the full moon." Remus kept his expression bland.

Albus finished his cookie and stood up. "Well that's settled then. I'll see you on the morning of the full moon in my office."

"Thank you, Headmaster." Remus held open the door and waited until he had heard Dumbledore's footsteps die away before swearing.

This new arrangement was going to cause him problems. Remus wondered if Dumbledore suspected that Peter had been in touch again. However, knowing there was little he could do without arousing Dumbledore's suspicions, Remus returned to the book he had been reading. Peter would have to wait for the moment.

29th October 1993

The small rat sat hidden in the bushes just outside the reach of the branches of the Whomping Willow. Peter knew that Remus would have to be there soon, so he was therefore surprised to see Albus Dumbledore making his way across the school grounds. Peter kept himself very still as Dumbledore immobilized the tree with a spell and entered the passageway beneath it.

Peter scurried off. He couldn't risk running into Dumbledore. He just wished that Remus had given him a chance to explain his side of the story. Now he would have to go back to his cave and rethink his strategy.

20th November 1993

Harry was playing a game of chess with Draco, and being beaten hollow, when he was disturbed by Professor Flitwick tapping him on the shoulder. "Can you come with me, Harry?"

"Are my sisters alright?" Harry's voice was full of worry.

Flitwick realized he must have frightened Harry. "Everyone in your family is well as far as I know. Don't worry, it's nothing to get concerned about."

Despite Flitwick's reassurances, Harry still felt a little alarmed as he followed his teacher back to his office. "Come in Harry."

Harry looked nervously around.

"Harry, as you know, Miss Chang is now awake." Flitwick sat down and indicated that Harry should do the same. "She is the reason you're here. She has asked if you would visit her."

"Right now?" Harry asked.

Flitwick nodded. "If your workload isn't too heavy."

Harry hurriedly assured his teacher that it wasn't. "It's not, Sir. I'm ahead with most of my reading and I've got all my homework done."

Flitwick beamed. "I thought you might have."

Harry stood up. "How are we getting there?"

"Floo." Flitwick approached his fireplace. "Headmaster Dumbledore has hooked me up to the floo network so that I can take you to the hospital."

Harry pulled a face but stepped gamely into the fireplace before calling out "St. Mungo's" and disappearing in a flash of green flame. Harry wasn't surprised to find himself hurtling towards the floor as he stumbled on arrival. Flitwick popped out beside him and helped him to his feet. "Not your favorite form of travel?"

Harry shook his head. "Not really, Sir."

"This way." Flitwick led Harry towards the Black Wing, where Sirius was waiting.

"Harry, it's nice to see you again." Sirius shook Harry by the hand.

"Hi, Sirius." Harry grinned happily. "Is Cho staying here?"

Sirius nodded. "I arranged for a private room for her. It wouldn't have been too pleasant for the poor girl to be staying on the public wards, particularly after what's happened to her."

Harry realized that Flitwick had disappeared. "Where's Professor Flitwick?"

Sirius looked round. "Perhaps he wanted to give you some privacy when you see Cho."

Harry swallowed hard. Now that they were getting closer to the room where the girl was staying, Harry's stomach began to perform somersaults; his nerves getting the better of him.

Sirius stopped outside of the door. "I'll let you go in alone. I'll be in my office on the fourth floor, when you've finished."

Harry watched Sirius walk away, and then knocked tentatively on the door. A voice beckoned him to come in. Pushing open the door, Harry found Cho sitting on the bed, reading a magazine.

Cho's face lit up when she saw who had come in. "Harry, it's wonderful to see you."

"Hi Cho." Harry mumbled nervously.

"Sit down." Cho pointed to the chair closest to her bed. "Did Professor Flitwick tell you why I wanted to talk to you?"

Harry shook his head. "No, just that you wanted to see me."

Cho got straight to the point. "Harry, I wanted to talk to you about the diary."

Harry answered reluctantly. "What about it?"

"Harry, Sirius has told me that you blamed yourself for what happened to me." Cho looked at Harry who refused to meet her eyes. "Harry, it wasn't your fault."

"So everyone keeps telling me." Harry pretended to brush away a piece of dirt from his trousers, keeping his gaze firmly fixed on the floor as he did so.

"Harry Lupin, you may have had the diary for a while but nothing you did was as bad as what I did." Cho's voice sounded shaky as she spoke.

"I got people petrified, just like you did. Tell me, how anything I did was different to you." Harry protested.

"Tom told me that he had to possess you to get you to do things he wanted." Cho looked to Harry for confirmation.

Harry looked up. "Yes, but I let him."

Cho snorted. "Big deal."

Harry was surprised at Cho's response.

"Harry, Tom didn't need to resort to those measures with me. I did what I did, willingly." Cho confessed.

"But..." Harry's voice faltered.

"You thought that I'd been possessed by him, didn't you?" Cho asked.

Harry nodded.

Cho continued. "He took me over the first time. Then he introduced me to dark magic under the guise of trying to help me. Like a fool I

tried one spell, and thought it wouldn't hurt to try another. One became two and before I knew it, I became hooked on it. The more Tom showed me, the more I wanted to learn. I was desperate, Harry, I would have done anything to feel the power that wielding the magic gave me."

Harry was a little troubled by the intense look on Cho's face. "What do you mean by anything?"

"I don't know. I think I might have killed someone if he'd ask me to." Cho hung her head.

Harry was horrified by what Cho was telling him, and thought about what had happened to his friend. "Did you try and kill Draco?"

Cho shook her head. "I didn't intentionally try to kill anyone. Tom asked me to open the chamber, and wanting to learn more dark magic, I did. I didn't stop to think about the consequences, and to be honest, I didn't care."

"But you don't speak parseltongue." Harry pointed out.

"I think Tom taught me a few words; I don't really know. One day I woke up and knew a few words in parseltongue; I still do." Cho told Harry. "Harry, there's more."

Harry wondered what else the girl had to confess. "Go on."

"I sent the threatening valentine to you." Cho admitted. "Tom told me to."

Harry actually felt relieved. At one point he had entertained the thought that it might have been Anna Black who had sent it to him. "Cho, I'd pretty much forgotten about it. It doesn't matter now."

Cho looked relieved. "Thank you."

"Cho, despite what you've told me, it was still my fault. If I had told someone, then you would never have had to go through what you did." Harry pointed out.

“Harry, it wasn’t your fault what happened to me. It was my own. I could have easily told someone about what was happening, but I didn’t. I became greedy to know more about the dark arts. I nearly got you killed. I got Lockhart killed.” Cho swallowed as she remembered being told about her Professor’s death.

At that moment, Harry finally gained total acceptance of what he had gone through himself. After listening to what Cho was saying, he realized that he had said exactly the same to everyone about what he had done. He didn’t blame Cho, so he shouldn’t still be blaming himself. “Cho, what happened to Lockhart wasn’t your fault. You couldn’t have fought Tom, any more than I could have.”

Harry watched as the tears spilled down Cho’s cheeks, her mouth moving but no words were coming out. “Come here.”

Cho leaned into Harry’s arms and cried pitifully, while Harry stroked her back and murmured quietly to her until she’d finished. “Sorry, I keep doing that.”

Harry tried to console Cho. “It took me ages to get over what had happened. I even stopped eating. You’ve just got to give it time. It was only just now that I truly realized I couldn’t have done anything about what happened. Everyone told me but deep down I still felt as if it was my fault.”

Cho felt better for the first time since she had learned of what had happened. As Harry said though, she still felt the weight of the blame on her shoulders. “Thanks Harry. I’m glad I asked to speak to you.”

“Anytime.” Harry turned to leave. “I’d better be going.”

“I understand if you don’t want to speak to me again.” Cho thought Harry was going because of what she had told him.

Harry shook his head. “Don’t be daft.”

“Will you stay for a while then?” Cho asked shyly.

Harry nodded, and was about to sit back down when a knock sounded at the door, and Sirius put his head around it. "Harry, my lunch meeting here has been cancelled. Will you be alright if I go meet Lily for lunch? I've been a little down on her about her new job and I want to make it up to her."

Harry nodded. "I'm sure Professor Flitwick will be back eventually."

Sirius shook his head. "Actually he's asked if I can see you back to school."

Harry wondered where his Professor had gone to. "Sirius, go to lunch. I can get something to eat at the canteen here. I'll go to your office once I've finished."

"You don't need to do that. I've already asked the house elves to bring you and Cho a light lunch in here." Sirius informed Harry.

Harry smiled at Sirius. "Thanks Sirius. I'll wait here for you then."

Sirius shut the door and hurried off towards the apparition point, leaving Harry to continue his conversation with Cho.

Harry sat down. He had had enough talking about the diary, and decided to turn the conversation onto what he hoped would be a lighter subject. "Has Jamie been to see you?"

Cho's face darkened. "Yes, he was here a few days ago."

"What happened?" Harry knew that the happy reunion he had been expecting between his brother and Cho obviously hadn't taken place.

"I apologized to him for dumping him. Tom had threatened to stop teaching me, if I didn't." Cho explained. "I then told him that I would be returning to school in time for the last week before Christmas, to give me a chance to slip back into things gradually, and to get to know my new roommates."

Harry interrupted her. "New roommates? Are you moving Houses?"

Cho shook her head. "I'm staying down in third year. Headmaster Dumbledore gave me the choice of intensive study from now until Christmas or to remain in third year."

"You chose to stay down a year?" Harry sounded incredulous.

"I couldn't face the intensive study. I know Ron did it, but I still get tired easily and didn't feel up to it." Cho defended her decision.

"Cho, it's okay. I understand. I'm taking more than two electives at the moment and I know how tough a lot of work can be, especially when you aren't feeling well." Harry didn't want Cho to think he was attacking her for her choice.

"Sorry." Cho looked a little abashed.

"You were saying about Jamie." Harry steered the conversation back to his brother.

"Oh yes." Cho pulled a face. "Anyway, I told him about returning to school and that if he wanted to, we could go to the Yule Ball together."

"He turned you down, didn't he?" Harry guessed from the look on Cho's face.

Cho nodded. "He said that he's dating someone else, Miranda Bailey, a second year."

"I didn't know." Harry told Cho. "But you did finish with him."

"I know I did. I was just disappointed when he told me." Cho sighed. "It doesn't matter. I'll probably be too tired to attend anyway."

Harry felt bad for the pretty girl. "I'm sorry you were disappointed."

Cho shrugged her shoulders, and turned her focus onto Harry. "So who are you taking?"

"I'm probably not going. I can hardly ask Pansy to this ball after what I did to her." Harry told Cho.

"But I thought you and she were together." Cho responded.

Harry pulled a face. "We were, but long before she was unpetrified, I realized that I didn't like her in a romantic way. Unfortunately I couldn't tell her because I was here in hospital when she was revived."

"Did she visit you in the hospital?" Cho asked.

Harry shook his head. "No. But on my birthday, her parents sent a betrothal offer to me on behalf of Pansy, and I had to refuse. I felt I owed it to her to tell her in person."

"What happened?" Cho knew that it couldn't have been good.

"She slapped me, and called me a few choice names. It's taken her a long time to get over it. She's only just about speaking to me again now." Harry informed Cho.

"How many offers did you get?" Cho knew that in Harry's position he was likely to have received quite a few.

"Don't ask." Harry grimaced. "For a custom that has supposedly gone out of fashion, I received far too many."

Cho grinned. "I only received one, and that was from my childhood friend, Delun. However my parents didn't think he was a suitable match for me."

"My Mum hated it. She told me to burn them!" Harry laughed. "I had to ask Maman how to deal with Pansy."

"Who's Maman?" Cho hadn't heard Harry refer to her before.

"It's what I call Lily now." Harry explained. "I didn't want to call her Mum as I thought it would be wrong, but I still wanted to call her

something a little more affectionate than Lily. Lily therefore came up with Maman.”

Cho was happy for Harry. “That’s really nice.”

“Thanks.” Anything else Harry was going to say was halted as a house elf popped in with a lunch platter for the two of them.

Cho placed the platter on the bed. “Help yourself.”

Harry and Cho silently shared the lunch; both lost in their own thoughts. After they had finished, the same house elf returned to take away the empty platter, before disappearing again.

Cho leant back against her pillows and stifled a yawn.

Harry got up. “Do you want me to go?”

“Please don’t.” Cho sat up. “It’s been nice to have some company.”

Harry sat back down, and decided to share what had been on his mind during lunch. “Cho, I have an idea; don’t feel obliged to accept though.”

Cho was intrigued. “What is it?”

“I’m not taking anyone to the Yule Ball. If you want to go, you could go with me.” Harry offered.

Cho hadn’t expected that. “Harry, that’s really sweet of you. I’d love to go with you.”

Harry smiled. “Great. It’ll be nice to be able to attend without any romantic pressure.”

Cho smiled back. “Tell me about it.” She yawned again.

Harry stood up once more. “I’m going to go wait in Sirius’ office. You could do with getting some sleep.”

“Please don’t go. Even if I fall sleep, you may as well stay here. I’ve got some magazines if you want something to read.” Cho indicated to the pile on a small side table close to her bed.

“Okay.” Harry moved across to the table and began to look through the pile. By the time he had found something he wanted to read, Cho was asleep. Taking the magazine back to his seat, Harry made himself comfortable to wait for Sirius to return.

The Ministry of Magic

Lily glanced up from the project she was working on as she heard someone coming into the room. “Dae, what can I do for you?”

“I thought you might like to get some lunch.” Felidae suggested.

“I don’t think so.” A voice interrupted the pair of them. “I’ve had to skive off from Hogwarts to get here.”

“Leo.” Lily got up and moved around to the desk to greet him. “How did you get away?”

“I dropped Harry off to see Cho Chang at St. Mungo’s. I’ve arranged for your husband to take him back to school, so I have the whole afternoon free. I wanted to see how things were coming along with the project.” Leo explained. He’d told Lily about his masquerading as Flitwick during her first day at work.

Dae coughed. “I think I was here first.”

“Tough.” Leo grinned at his brother. “Seniority wins out.”

“Why don’t you both take me out to lunch?” Lily suggested.

“Why not?” Leo held out his arm, only to be interrupted by a tap at the door.

Lily looked up to see Sirius standing there. “Sirius, what are you doing here?”

"I wanted to take my lovely wife to lunch to apologize for being so pigheaded about everything." Sirius held out the flowers he had stopped to buy on the way.

Lily's face lit up. "Oh, Sirius, they're beautiful." She turned to the other men in the room. "Would you mind if I took a raincheck on lunch?"

Both men shook their head. "Go ahead." Dae nodded to Sirius. "Black."

"Venant." Sirius nodded back. Neither man had managed to get past their dislike of the other, and had instead settled for being coldly polite to each other.

Lily shook her head and turned to Leo. "I'm forgetting my manners."

"Leo, this is Sirius Black, my husband." She then turned to Sirius. "This is Leo Simultas." Lily used the name Leo assumed when at work.

"Lord Black, it's a pleasure." Leo held out his hand.

"Please, call me Sirius." Sirius shook the proffered hand and turned back to his wife. "Shall we go?"

Dae stopped Lily. "Lily, take the rest of the day off. You shouldn't really be here on a Saturday anyway."

"Thanks Dae." Lily smiled happily up at Sirius and the two of them left the room.

Dae closed the door. "Out with it."

"With what?" Leo asked.

Dae pinned his brother down with his gaze. "You know exactly what is going on with the project in spite of living at Hogwarts for most of the term so why did you feel it necessary to come here?"

Leo didn't hesitate. "Reading about a project is one thing; hearing about it from its designer is another."

Dae pulled a face. "Sorry, I thought for a moment that you had an ulterior motive."

"Such as?" Leo sounded indignant.

"I thought you were going to make a move on Lily." Dae admitted.

Leo laughed. "Where on earth did you get that idea?"

"I don't know. It just seemed odd that you would suddenly show up wanting to know about a project that you have been receiving reports on since its inception, wanting to take Lily out to lunch." Dae admitted.

"I could accuse you of the same. You'd just asked Lily to lunch when I arrived." Leo pointed out.

Dae had absolutely no designs on Lily. "I was going to take her upstairs for a sandwich. We're colleagues who work with each other every day and quite often take lunch together. Where were you going to take her?"

"I don't know. I was going to let her choose." Leo turned towards the door. "Why don't you join me for lunch instead?"

"Let me just take these papers I was going to go over with Lily back to my office. I'll just be a minute." Dae walked out of the room.

Leo ran a hand through his hair, and let his smile drop. He hadn't exactly been honest with his brother. Even though he had only met her a few times, Leo was quite taken with Lily.

"So I was right." Dae's voice surprised Leo.

"I thought you were going to your office." Leo snapped.

"You do like her don't you? I saw your face when you thought I'd gone." Dae pushed his brother to come clean.

"Alright, yes I do." Leo admitted, his face taking on a bereft look.

"Oh Merlin. You don't just like her. You're in love with her, aren't you?" Dae hoped he wasn't right.

Leo sat down. "Yes."

"But she's married." Dae pointed out.

"It doesn't matter. I think I fell for her from the first moment I saw her." Leo smiled ruefully at his brother. "Don't say anything. I know she's a lost cause, and that she'll never leave her husband."

"So why were you taking her to lunch then?" Dae asked quietly.

"I just wanted to spend some time with her." Leo got up; he'd had enough of Dae's questions. "Are you coming to lunch or what?"

Dae nodded. "I said I was."

"Let's go then." Leo pushed open the door and walked out, leaving his brother to follow him.

Hogwarts

Harry got back to Hogwarts just before dinner, only to bump into Jamie who grabbed Harry by the arm. "Where have you been? I've been looking everywhere for you."

"Why?" Harry was surprised.

"I wondered if you might like to get some quidditch practice in." Jamie offered.

Harry was a little suspicious of Jamie's motives. "With a member of the opposition?"

"Look, I'll be honest. I've heard that Slytherin have got a damn good replacement for Higgs. I thought you might like to get together for a

little practice. I'd rather see Ravenclaw beat Slytherin than not." Jamie told his brother.

"Fair enough. I'll just go get my broom." Harry started to leave.

"Where were you?" Jamie asked.

"With Cho." Harry told him.

Jamie didn't look too happy at Harry's answer. "Why did you go there?"

"Because she wanted to talk to me about the diary." Harry stopped walking and turned to face Jamie. "Jamie, do you still like her?"

Jamie shook his head. "Of course not."

"Then why are you looking at me as if I've committed some kind of crime?" Harry asked.

"I'm not." Jamie refuted Harry's allegation. "Did she tell you that I'm seeing Miranda now?"

"She did." Harry decided to be open with Jamie. "Look, I'm taking Cho to the ball. Do you have a problem with that?"

"No." Jamie told Harry, despite the fact that he did.

"Good." Harry turned and started walking back towards Ravenclaw. "I'll meet you on the pitch in five minutes."

"Sure." Jamie walked off in the opposite direction.

Harry shook his head and set off for Ravenclaw tower.

December 8th 1993

Nia had just taken the last of the muffins she was baking out of the oven, when a knock at the door disturbed her. Opening the door she

was surprised to find Remus standing there. "Come in. I didn't expect to see you today."

"With all Hogsmeade visits for the students being cancelled, I've got some spare time, so I thought I'd pop in and see Scarlett." Remus explained.

To try and help Scarlett adjust, Remus had been visiting every fortnight, and staying over on a Saturday night. The evening had usually ended with him and Nia talking civilly over a bottle of wine. It had helped the two of them to become friends; something they had failed to do during their marriage.

Remus looked around for his daughter. "Isn't she here?"

"She's staying at Lily's for a few days." Nia informed Remus.

"So you and Lily are speaking again?" Remus asked. "When did that happen?"

Nia closed the door. "She came round last week with her youngest, Cassie. The girls played and we spent most of the day talking." Nia didn't enlighten Remus, however, as to what they had discussed.

Nia headed back towards the kitchen. "Sorry, we'll have to talk in here; I'm getting ready for a Christmas hunting lunch."

Remus sniffed the air appreciatively. "It smells goods."

Nia pushed a muffin at Remus. "Go ahead; I made extra anyway."

Remus unwrapped the still-warm muffin and bit into it, sighing appreciatively as the tart blueberries exploded on his tongue. "That's really good."

"Thanks." Nia began to wrap the pork pies she had made. "How's Harry doing?"

"I don't really know. He still isn't speaking to me." Remus admitted.

Nia stopped what she was doing. "I thought you were going to speak to him again."

"I tried." Remus protested.

"And?" Nia wasn't going to let Remus off the hook.

"He still doesn't want to talk to me." Remus sounded dejected.

Nia wasn't exactly shocked by Remus' comment. "I'm sorry, Remus, but what did you expect?"

"Exactly that, to be honest." Remus told his wife.

"Did you tell the children about the divorce?" Nia stacked the containers of mayonnaise she had finished making earlier inside the refrigerator.

Remus swallowed the last of the muffin before answering. "I told the children last night. Harry asked to be excused, probably because he already knew, and Dudley ran off after him."

"What about the girls?" Nia missed her eldest daughters and couldn't wait for them to return for the Christmas holidays.

"Strangely enough Auri took it the hardest. They both stayed over in my room. Georgie was actually an absolute rock." Remus had been surprised at the girls' reactions.

"That doesn't really surprise me. Aurilia, like Scarlett-Rose, has always thought the world of you. It's probably hit her hard that you won't be around all the time from now on." Nia knew Remus hadn't realized how much his eldest daughter thought of him.

"I've always thought of Auri as being independent and able to cope. It was a bit of shock to see her in pieces." Remus had allowed both girls to stay in his rooms until he returned as neither of them had wanted to return to respective houses.

"I just wish I could have been there." Nia fretted. "It's Harry who concerns me the most though. He's had to carry the knowledge of what's happened between us for all of this time."

Remus sighed heavily. "There's nothing we can do about it now. I'm just hoping he'll come round."

Despite what Remus had done, Nia still felt a little sorry for what he was going through. "It must be hard on you, seeing him every day, knowing that he doesn't want to speak to you."

"It's my own fault. I'm just going to have to wait it out." Remus looked pitifully at Nia, who slid a second muffin towards him.

"When do you want to sign the divorce papers?" Nia finally sat down.

"Do you want to leave it until after Christmas?" Remus asked.

Nia shook her head. "I think it's best to make a clean break of things don't you?"

Remus was relieved to hear that his wife seemed to be coming to terms with the idea of the divorce. "I agree. I've already signed the Cottage over to you."

"Remus, I've already said that I can move to somewhere smaller." Nia protested.

Remus shook his head. "It was my shit that caused this. I don't see why you should have to deal with the backlash. I've already made arrangements for the monthly payments to be paid out of my wages."

"Are you sure you can afford it?" Nia knew from their discussions how tight money was going to be for Remus.

"I'm fine while I'm at Hogwarts, and despite our differences, Harry is still amenable to me using Grimmauld Square during the summer." Remus reassured Nia.

“Good.” Nia got up and pulled a bottle of white wine from the refrigerator. “Would you care to join me?”

Remus nodded. “Thanks.”

After pouring a glass for Remus, Nia turned to him. “What are your plans for Christmas?”

“I have to cover the Christmas dinner at Hogwarts being its newest member of staff. I thought I might take the children out to dinner on Christmas Eve.” Remus suggested.

Nia knew that the children would be disappointed not to see Remus on Christmas Day. “Harry won’t be here. He’s going to stay with the Weasleys until Christmas Eve morning and then he’s going to Lily’s and returning for Christmas lunch.”

This was news to Remus. “I didn’t know.”

Nia wrinkled her nose. “Well, if he’s not speaking to you, that’s not exactly surprising is it?”

“I take it the Lovegoods will be joining you for Christmas dinner.” Remus asked casually.

Nia blushed slightly. “Yes, they will.”

Remus took several mouthfuls of the crisp Sancerre before answering. “Nia, it’s okay to like Grimstock.”

“I think it’s a little too soon for me to be thinking of anyone in a romantic light.” Nia pointed out.

Remus thought that his wife had been falling for Lovegood for a while, but didn’t say anything. He was also sure that Lovegood felt the same way. “Nia, I’m really sorry that things didn’t work out between us.”

“So am I.” Nia looked a little rueful as she spoke. “It’s probably better this way. We were just tearing each other apart when we were together.”

“To be perfectly frank, I think we have a better relationship now.” Remus smiled lightly as Nia refilled his glass.

“You’re probably right. I don’t have to lie awake at night worrying about whether you’re going to come home to me or not.” Seeing Remus’ face begin to darken, Nia held up her hand. “I’m not pointing fingers, Remus; I’m just stating a fact.”

Remus shook his head. “I’m not pissed at you. I’m more pissed at myself. I did treat you shoddily didn’t I?”

Nia simply nodded. “You did, but I was a fool to put up with it.”

“Harry was right, you were too good for me.” Remus then took Nia’s hand in his own. “I do still care about you.”

“I know you do.” Nia squeezed Remus’ hand gently. “But I think we make better friends than we do a married couple.

“I know.” Remus then sighed. “Even after everything I’ve done, even knowing what we’re about to do is for the best, I’m still finding it hard to let go.”

Nia’s bottom lip quivered a little. “Me too.”

“Are you sure you want to go ahead with this right now?” Remus asked.

Nia let go of Remus’ hand. “You have the divorce papers with you?”

Remus reached inside his robes and pulled out a scroll. “This is the divorce decree. Do you want me to go ahead and sign it?”

Nia swallowed hard before answering. “I think so. It’s going to be easier if we just get it all over and done by signing it now.”

Remus looked embarrassed. “You don’t have to sign it.”

“Why not?” Nia asked.

“We had a wizarding ceremony, and you’re a muggle. You don’t have the right to decide if we should be able to get a divorce.” Remus sounded discomfited.

Nia wasn’t impressed. “You mean that it’s always been solely up to you whether we could divorce or not just because I’m not a witch?”

Remus nodded. “It’s not something I agree with personally, but it is wizarding law.”

Nia snorted. “Archaic bloody society.”

Remus grinned at Nia, who relaxed and grinned back. “I’ll get on with it then.”

Nia watched as Remus pulled out a self-inking quill and signed his name to the paper which would end their marriage. He then pulled out his wand and ignited the paper. A black ribbon encircled them both for a few seconds before disintegrating. “Is that it then?”

Remus stood up. “It is.”

“Remus, would you like to stay for dinner?” Nia had made a roast, and she didn’t really feel like being alone.

Remus shook his head. “I can’t; I need to get back to Hogwarts. I’ve still got quite a bit of marking to catch up.”

Nia nodded. “I understand.”

Remus put down his glass and took Nia into his arms for one final time. “I really am sorry, Nia.”

Nia held back her tears as she returned Remus’ hug. “So am I, Remus.”

Remus then let Nia go, and walked out of the door.

Grimstock Lovegood watched Remus walk up the front path and closed the gate behind him. Seeing Remus wipe his eyes before apparating away, Grim had a feeling about what Remus had been to see Nia about. Concerned for Nia, Grim walked around to the back of Darcy Cottage, to find Nia in the kitchen trying not to cry as she drank a glass of white wine.

“He’s finally done it, hasn’t he?” Grim pushed Nia’s glass aside and pulled her into his arms.

Nia finally gave into the tears she had been holding back, and wept for the loss of her marriage. Eventually, however, she managed to get herself under control.

Grim handed her a large handkerchief. “Go ahead and blow your nose.”

Nia was a little embarrassed at doing so in front of Grim, but figured that he’d already seen her blotchy red face anyway. After wiping her eyes, Nia picked up the wine glass and knocked back the remaining liquid. “It’s silly really, my crying like this. We both knew it was over but it hurts more than I imagined it would.”

“It’s always hard to come to terms with the fact that you’ve lost something.” Grim said gently.

Nia poured out the rest of the bottle of wine into her glass. “I really need a drink today. Shall I open another bottle for you?”

“Thanks but I’d prefer a scotch.” Grim walked into what had been Remus’ study and helped himself to a large scotch from the bottle that Remus had left there.

Grim returned to the sitting room and raised his glass. “To new beginnings.”

Nia swallowed hard. “New beginnings.” Her lip quivered as she started to cry again.

Grim put down his scotch and moved to hold her. "Nia, I'll always be here for you, you do know that don't you?"

"Thank you." Nia buried deeper into Grim's embrace, feeling safe and secure for the first time in months. "I have a feeling I might be doing that more than I'd like to over the next few days."

"It's healthy to go through a mourning period; I did the same when I lost my wife." Grimstock disclosed, as he held the woman he had come to care about deeply closer to him.

"I didn't know you were ever married." Nia pulled back from Grim's embrace and took a seat in her favorite chair. "Luna's never mentioned it."

"She doesn't know, I don't think." Grim told Nia. "It was a long time ago."

"Do you mind me asking what happened?" Nia asked gently.

"I lost my wife and daughter in childbirth." Grim looked a little sad as he spoke. "We got married right out of Hogwarts; two years later Emily was dead."

Nia felt her heart go out to the man sitting opposite her. "You would have made a wonderful father; you're so good with the girls and Luna."

"Thanks." Grim's voice sounded a little gruff as he spoke. Not wanting to dwell on his past, Grim sniffed the air. "Is that roast I smell?"

Nia realized that Grim didn't really want to discuss the subject any further. "It is. Do you want to join me for dinner?"

"I wouldn't say no." Grim got up and pulled Nia to her feet. "I've got a nice bottle of Pinot Noir in the house that will go nicely with this meal. Let me just pop back and get it." Knowing Nia wasn't too fond of apparition, Grim walked out of the door.

Nia watched him go. She was grateful that she had such a good friend in Grim. She'd been telling the truth when she told Grim that she didn't think it would hurt so badly. She hadn't expected it to as she'd pretty much resigned herself to the fact that her marriage was over. The only good thing to come out of it was the fact that she and Remus had managed to forge a new relationship based on mutual friendship. Hearing Grim returning, Nia pasted a smile on her face and turned to get the roast out of the oven.

The Yule Ball

Harry waited for Cho to come down the stairs from the girl's dormitory. He knew how hard it had been for her to come back and he'd done everything he could to help her in the week since she had joined the third years.

Cho stepped nervously from her room. Even though she and Harry were just going to the ball as friends, she still had butterflies in her stomach about her appearance.

Harry looked up as Cho came down the stairway. On arriving at the bottom of the staircase, he hurried over to her, and passed her a single white rose. "I wasn't sure what color you would be wearing so I settled for white."

"Harry, it's beautiful." Cho slid the rose bud into her hair, and then brushed down her silvery grey cheongsam.

"You look really pretty." Harry truthfully told his date.

Cho blushed. "Thanks Harry."

Luna suddenly appeared from behind Cho, and give a twirl in front of Harry. "Do you think Dudley will like it?"

Harry grinned. Luna's bright pink dress almost hurt to look at, but it was definitely her. "I think he'll love it. It really suits you."

Luna smiled at Harry. "Thanks, Harry."

Draco nudged Harry. "I need to go. I've got to meet your sister."

Harry smirked at his friend. "I still can't believe she finagled a date with you."

Draco shrugged his shoulders. "What can I say, she wore me down."

Pansy flounced by the pair and snorted. "You could have gone with me Draco, but no, little miss bossy pants had to butt in and offer. I still can't believe you said yes."

Listening to Pansy's words, Harry knew then why Draco had agreed to take his sister. Pansy had been a bit of a nuisance since the start of term, draping herself all over Draco, and generally dropping large hints that she was available. Harry had been surprised at her behavior, especially as she and Draco had been friends for quite some time, and neither of them had showed any previous inclination in taking things any further. Harry didn't realize that Pansy had been looking for some reassurance that she was still appealing after he had turned her down.

"I'll see you down there, Draco. I'll save you a space at the table." Harry offered.

Harry then turned to Cho and placed her hand on his arm. "Let's go."

On entering the Great Hall, Harry found an empty table and took a seat next to Cho. He looked up to see Hermione coming into the room with her partner. Harry wasn't exactly happy with Hermione's choice of partner, but knew he had little recourse except to grin and bear it. Things between him and Hermione had been like walking on eggshells ever since he had turned her down, but for the sake of sharing their lessons, they had smoothed over the rough cracks in their relationship, and had managed to re-establish some semblance of their earlier friendship.

Hermione headed straight for Harry's table. "Hi Harry, Cho." She then turned to Cho. "I don't believe you've met my fiancé. Cho, this is Felidae Venant. Felidae, this is Cho Chang."

Felidae nodded to Cho before pulling out a seat for Hermione to sit down.

Hermione continued speaking. "It's Felidae's birthday, so Headmaster Dumbledore gave him permission to attend the ball with me."

"That's nice. What did she get you?" Harry asked Felidae.

Felidae smiled. "I don't think she got me anything."

"Actually I did." Hermione placed a long, thin rectangular box onto the table.

Felidae took the box. "I'll open it a little later."

Hermione smiled and began to chat with Luna, who had just occupied the seat to Hermione's left.

Harry turned to Cho. "Would you like to dance?"

Cho accepted, and the two of them moved away from the table and onto the dance floor.

The evening was little more than halfway over, when Cho, who was starting to feel a little fatigued, turned to Harry. "Do you mind if we go outside for some fresh air? I'm feeling a little hot."

"Do you want something to drink to take with you?" Harry asked solicitously.

Cho shook her head, so Harry led her out towards the enclosed garden and sat down next to her on a bench.

Cho fanned herself with her hand. "I'm so glad I went to the ball."

Harry smiled. "Me too. It's been more fun than I thought it would be."

Cho leant against Harry and put her head on his shoulder. "You don't mind do you?"

Harry slipped his arm around her. "Not at all."

Cho felt her butterflies from earlier return when Harry's arm slid around her waist. "Harry?"

"Yes?" Harry looked down to where Cho was nestled close to him.

"Would you like to have one more dance before we eat?" Cho turned her head to look at him.

"Yes." Harry murmured as he lifted his free hand and cupped Cho's face. Harry's lips had just touched Cho's, when a noise startled him.

"Sorry, we didn't realize there was anyone else out here." Hermione was standing at the entrance to the garden, Felidae just behind her.

"There's plenty of space." Harry lifted his head and waved his free arm towards the rest of the garden.

Hermione had stepped through the doorway and felt sick. She had thought that Harry had only been taking Cho to the ball as a friend but to see him sitting there with his arm wrapped around the girl's waist and kissing her, had cut through Hermione's heart like a knife. "Let's go over there."

Felidae followed his fiancée to a bench not that far away from Harry. Hermione sat down on the bench and patted the space beside her. "Sit down, and open your present."

Felidae did as Hermione requested; gasping slightly as he lifted the lid from the gift box. "Hermione, this is too much."

"Do you like it?" Hermione asked anxiously.

Felidae lifted the wrought silver dagger into the light. "It's perfect. Where did you get it?"

"I had it made." Hermione told him.

"It must have cost a fortune." Felidae sounded concerned.

"It doesn't matter what it cost. I wanted to get something personal for you, so I settled on the dagger." Hermione waved off Felidae's protestations.

"Thank you." Felidae placed the dagger back in the box.

Hermione's next words stunned him. "Felidae, will you kiss me?"

Felidae shook his head. "I can't kiss you."

Hermione looked crestfallen. "Am I really that unattractive?"

Felidae had felt Hermione start slightly at the sight of Harry kissing the pretty Chinese girl and knew what was bothering Hermione. "Hermione, you know you're not. I simply don't think that it would be appropriate for me to kiss you."

"Please, just one kiss." Hermione hoped that Harry watching.

Felidae quietly asked. "Why, Hermione?"

Hermione didn't say anything.

Felidae answered the question for her. "You want Harry to see, don't you? You're hoping that he'll realize that he's made a mistake."

Hermione nodded.

"Hermione, no matter how much I liked you, I would never kiss you. I'm a lot older than you and, as I said earlier, it would be totally inappropriate. If you had been older and you were genuinely attracted to me, then yes, I probably would have kissed you. Right now though, I can't." Felidae gently told Hermione, as he pushed a stray piece of hair that had fallen across her face away.

Hermione knew he was right. "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have asked. I just feel so lonely and miserable right now. Papa barely spares me a hello, Mama is tied up with the children and seeing Harry with Cho was the final straw."

Felidae knew that Hermione wasn't helping herself by sitting across from Harry and Cho. "I think it's best if we return to the ball, don't you?" Felidae stood up and held out his hand which Hermione took. As she passed Harry, she glanced over to see him totally engaged in his conversation with Cho; she didn't think he'd realized that she was even walking by him.

Harry was more than aware that Hermione was going by him. He didn't want her to know that he was conscious of everything she had done since she first entered the garden. Harry had been glad when Cho settled her head on his shoulder once more, so Harry could look over the top of it and see what Hermione and Felidae were doing. He had watched as Felidae had opened the gift containing the dagger. Harry guessed that the dagger must have cost a fortune. His heart had sunk as he saw how tenderly Felidae had stroked Hermione's cheek, and taken her hand as she stood up. As soon as he realized they were about to head his way, Harry had turned his full attention back to Cho.

Hermione stumbled up the corridor back towards the Great Hall. Felidae sighed, and stopped Hermione before she reached the end of the corridor. "Hermione, I know it hurts."

"How could you?" Hermione's voice sounded thick with tears.

"Because I've been in love before. I caught the girl I was dating kissing someone else. We'd been dating for nearly six months. I really thought that she was the one. It just goes to show how wrong someone can be." Felidae drew Hermione away from the Great Hall and into the empty ante-chamber leading to it. "I confronted her afterwards and she just shrugged her shoulders and said that a better offer had come along."

"Oh, Felidae." Hermione forgot her own woes for a moment. "What happened to her?"

"She cheated on the guy she dumped me for, but got caught." Felidae told Hermione. "It's wrong but I have to admit that it felt good to know

that she went through the same as I did; apparently she really liked the guy.”

Hermione slid her arms around Felidae’s waist and hugged him. “I’m sorry you had to go through that.”

“It was a good lesson for me.” Felidae slid his own arms around Hermione. “It proved to me that there isn’t just one person out there for you.”

Hermione understood what Felidae was trying to tell her. “So I shouldn’t pin all my hopes on Harry?”

“No, you shouldn’t. You’ll eventually meet other people.” Felidae let Hermione go and sat down. “I have.”

Hermione was curious. “Are you seeing anyone at the moment?”

Felidae nodded. “A girl from my office.”

“And she doesn’t mind that you’re engaged to me?” Hermione asked.

Felidae laughed. “Not in the slightest. We both know the score. She isn’t looking for a long term relationship right now. Our relationship isn’t exactly a meeting of minds.”

Hermione blushed. “Oh.”

Felidae grinned at Hermione. “Well, you did ask.”

Hermione grinned back. “In future, I think I’ll count to three before I ask questions like again.”

“Seriously though, Hermione, if you ever need me I’ll always be there for you.” Felidae stood up.

“Shall we get something to eat?” Hermione now felt a little more positive; perhaps Felidae was right about Harry. “I suddenly feel hungry.”

Felidae pulled open the door of the antechamber to lead her outside to find an angry Jamie sitting on top of Harry, with his hands around his brother's throat. Jamie's girlfriend, Miranda was crying on Colin Creevey's shoulder as she watched her boyfriend fighting his brother over someone he supposedly no longer liked.

"... she's mine." Jamie smacked his fist into Harry's face, as Cho screamed at him to get off Harry.

Felidae grabbed Jamie. "Jamie, what do you think you are doing?"

"He stole my girlfriend." Jamie tried to pull free of Felidae's grasp.

"What's going on here?" Severus' silky voice caused everyone to fall silent.

No-one wanted to answer, so Felidae stepped up. "I believe that Jamie here feels that Harry has stolen his girlfriend, so he decided to take it out on his brother with his fists."

Severus turned to Jamie. "Is this true Mr. Potter?"

Jamie started to protest. "But he stole..."

"I didn't ask that. I wanted to know if you hit Mr. Lupin." Severus snapped out.

Jamie didn't answer, so Cho did it for him. "Yes, he did Professor Snape."

"Thank you, Miss Chang." Severus turned his attention back to Jamie. "When you return from the Christmas break, you will be serving detention for a month with Mr. Filch."

"But what about quidditch practice?" Jamie blurted out.

"What about it?" Severus asked.

Jamie would have said something stupid if Ron hadn't stamped on his foot.

“Sensible move, Mr. Prewett.” Severus bent down over Harry. “I suggest you go see Madam Pomfrey, Mr. Lupin.”

Cho moved to help Harry up. “I’ll take him.”

Hermione watched as Harry leant on Cho as they left the area. She then turned back to look for her father to find him missing. “Where did Papa go?”

“He left by the other door.” Felidae informed her.

“Oh.” Hermione looked crestfallen. “He just doesn’t seem to have time to spare to talk to me anymore. I don’t know what it is.”

“He’s probably just busy.” Felidae held out his arm. “Let’s go get something to eat.”

Hermione took Felidae’s arm and let him lead her into the great hall.

Harry left the infirmary with Cho walking quietly beside him. Stopping suddenly, Harry turned to Cho. “I’m sorry the evening ended like this. I had a feeling Jamie still liked you.”

“Why would you think that?” Cho asked.

“I met him after I visited you in the hospital. He didn’t seem that happy about my taking you to the ball.” Harry explained.

“But you still took me anyway.” Cho observed.

Harry ran his hand through his hair. “Yes, I did.”

“It wasn’t just to spite Jamie was it?” Cho sounded unsure of herself as she spoke.

“Absolutely not.” Harry sighed. “I’ve kind of liked you for ages. When you told me that Jamie didn’t want to go with you, I decided that he’d had his chance and had blown it.” Harry didn’t tell her about

Hermione. "Look, if you want to forget about seeing me again, I'll understand."

Cho shook her head. "I was having a good time until Jamie decided to come over all macho." Cho didn't admit to Harry that she'd been thrilled that Jamie obviously still liked her.

"So you do want to go out with me again?" Harry asked hopefully.

Cho took Harry's hand. "I'd love to."

Harry gently squeezed Cho's hand. "What are you doing during the Christmas holidays?"

"Nothing much. My family are flying out from Hong Kong to visit, so I don't have to leave the country this year." Cho informed Harry.

Harry thought quickly. "I'm visiting the Weasleys until Christmas Eve, when I going to stay with the Blacks overnight. Would you like to meet up after that?"

Cho nodded. "That would be great. My family won't mind as long as I'm home for when my grandparents arrive on Christmas Eve."

Harry was curious. "I thought that the Chinese didn't celebrate Christmas."

"We don't," Cho informed Harry, "but as it's one of the main times when my sisters and I are home from school, my parents usually arrange a family reunion around it and, again, for the Chinese New Year."

Harry tried to recall what he knew about the Chinese New Year. He thought that it was some time in January. "I expect you miss that don't you."

"I do." Cho looked wistful.

"Perhaps we could celebrate it." Harry suggested.

Cho was touched by Harry's thoughtfulness. "I'd love to."

Cho and Harry then continued walking until they reached their tower, when Cho let go of Harry's hand. "I did have a nice night."

"I'm glad." Harry didn't quite know what to do now they had gotten back to Ravenclaw. Noticing that Cho didn't seem in a rush to get back inside, however, Harry took her hand again and pulled her close to him. He then slid his hand into Cho's hair and kissed her gently, only deepening the kiss when he felt Cho's lips part under his own.

Neither of them were willing to admit to the other that they both wished it could have been someone very different sharing the kiss with them.

Next Chapter: Severus finally snaps; Remus reveals his biggest secret; Peter reappears; Harry regrets his decision to date Cho.

I'll probably update at the weekend, if not before, if I can. However, school has now restarted for me.

Chapter 32: Where Truths Are Revealed

Christmas Eve

Virginie opened the door barely a moment after Felidae knocked at it. "Felidae, how lovely to see you."

Felidae thought Virginie looked strained but greeted her warmly anyway. "You're looking well, Virginie."

"Shall we go in?" Severus appeared from behind Virginie. "Salty is waiting to serve the meal."

On entering the dining room, Felidae spotted that the dining table had only been laid for three, and turned to Severus. "Where's Hermione?"

When Severus failed to respond to Felidae's question, Virginie answered him while frowning at Severus. "She's staying with her friend Luna Lovegood, but she'll be back tomorrow morning."

The meal continued uneventfully until Hermione's name was brought up again when Virginie mentioned the Yule Ball. "Thanks for taking Hermione. She was glad you told her it was your birthday. She would have been embarrassed if she hadn't been able to get you something."

"Her gift was extremely thoughtful. I felt a little awkward accepting something so obviously expensive." Felidae told Virginie.

"Hermione has her own money. What she does with it, is up to her. I trust my daughter to act in a sensible manner." Virginie explained, while Severus muttered something under his breath that she didn't quite catch. "Did you say something, Severus?"

"No." Severus turned his attention to the cheese platter.

Felidae could feel the undercurrents in the room and tried to lighten the conversation. "I thought Hermione looked really pretty at the Yule Ball."

"I ordered her dress from the wedding gown shop that opened in Hogsmeade a while years ago. They also stock some lovely ball gowns." Virginia informed Felidae.

"Well I thought it really suited her." Felidae tried to draw Severus into the conversation. "What did you think of it, Severus?"

"I can't say that I remember what she wore." Severus snapped. "I had more important things on my mind at the time."

Virginia stood up. "Felidae, would you excuse us for a moment?"

Virginia walked out and waited for Severus to follow her before shutting the dining room door behind her. "Severus, I thought we might have a nice dinner this evening but obviously I was wrong."

"I don't think this is the best time for this conversation." Severus made a move back towards the door.

Virginia had put up with Severus' behavior for long enough. "It's never the right time though is it? Every time I've brought up Hermione, you've either snapped at me or refused to discuss her. Just what the hell is wrong with you?"

"It's not me that's the problem." Severus hissed at his wife. "It's you."

"And what have I done?" Virginia stood with her hands on her hips.

Severus was aware of their guest on the other side of the door. "This really isn't the right time for this. We've got a guest."

"Who you invited when I suggested that we have a quiet dinner for just the two of us." Virginia pointed out.

"You've never minded before when I've invited a friend over." Severus blustered.

"I think you thought you'd avoid being alone with me." Seeing Severus' face become like stone, Virginia gave up. "If you want to go

back in, please do. Give my apologies to Felidae and tell him I'm feeling unwell."

"But that would be a lie." Severus informed his wife.

Virginie raised her eyebrows. "Since when have you been concerned about telling a little white lie?"

"Since I found out that little white lies are nothing more than omissions of the truth." Severus snarled at his wife.

Virginie anger started to return at her husband's intimation. "If you've got something to say, then why don't you just come out and say it instead of hiding behind veiled insinuations."

Severus' face remained implacable. "I have no idea what you are going on about."

Virginie lowered her voice. "Please Severus, tell me what's wrong."

It was Severus' turn to become incensed as he looked at the pleading face of his deceitful wife. "You really want to know what's wrong?"

Virginie nodded. "Of course. I can't put it right unless you tell me."

Severus sneered at Virginie, making her recoil. "You can't put this right."

"Tell me, what have I done?" Virginie felt almost afraid of her husband at that moment.

"Why didn't you tell me you knew Lupin?" Severus asked in a quiet but menacing voice.

"This is all because I didn't tell you I knew Remus?" Virginie didn't give Severus time to respond as she suddenly realized something. "How did you find out that I knew him?"

"Now there's a tale to be told." Severus looked as if he was relishing the moment. "I was taking a stroll through the castle at the start of

term, when who should I see but my lovely wife. And can you guess where she was going?"

Virginie then knew that Severus must have seen her going into Remus' rooms, even though she had checked to make sure that there had been no-one around. "It's no different than you visiting Anna Jameson in her rooms."

Severus scoffed at the comparison. "But I think it is. I'm not sleeping with Anna."

Virginie slapped Severus. "How dare you accuse me of sleeping with Remus?"

"Why not, it wouldn't be the first time would it?" Severus' voice rose.

Virginie's eyes flashed angrily. "And what the hell's that supposed to mean?"

At that moment the door to the dining room opened, and Felidae stepped out. "I think it might be best if I left."

"But the fun's just started." Severus sounded almost manic. "My wife's about to try and deny that she's ever slept with Lupin."

Virginie defended herself. "But I haven't."

"Then how do you explain Hermione?" Severus played his trump card.

Felidae swore softly under his breath.

"I don't know what you mean." Virginie had gone white.

Felidae didn't bother saying anything more and swiftly exited out of the room.

Remus pulled open his door at the insistent banging, to be almost knocked over by Felidae. "You stupid bastard. I can't believe you slept with her, especially after what she went through."

“Who are you going on about?” Remus drew Felidae into the corridor and closed his door behind him.

“Virginie. Right now she and Severus are going at it hammer and tongs. For some strange reason Severus believes you are Hermione’s father.” Felidae snarled at his friend.

“You should know me better than that.” Remus snapped back.

“But I do know you, and I know what you’re like around women, Remus. Who’s to say that Virginie wasn’t fair game for you?” Felidae taunted his friend.

Felidae regretted his decision as found himself slammed up against the wall, two inches off the ground as Remus lifted him up by his throat. “I’ve never slept with Virginie. What kind of a sick bastard do you think I am?”

“You’re telling the truth aren’t you?” Felidae coughed slightly as he struggled to breathe.

“Of course I am.” Remus took a deep breath as he struggled to get his temper under control. “Where are they?”

“In Severus’ rooms.” Felidae fought to regain his footing as Remus dropped him to the ground.

Remus looked down at Felidae. “My children are in my rooms. I suggest you don’t mention any of this to them.” He then swung away from Felidae and ran off in the direction of the staircase.

Before he even reached Severus’ rooms, Remus’ acute hearing picked up the sound of Severus berating his wife. Swiftly he cast a privacy spell, so that no more of the conversation could be overheard by anyone passing by. He just hoped that Hermione wasn’t there to hear it. Not bothering to knock, Remus flung open the door to find Virginie sobbing on the floor.

“Oh look, your lover has come running to save you.” Severus pulled out his wand, causing Remus to grind to a halt. “Lupin, I’m glad you’re here to see this.”

Remus wondered what Severus could want him to witness. “See what?”

“The moment I disinherit your precious daughter.” Severus raised his wand to make the incantation.

“Please, Severus, no.” Virginie begged. “Hermione is not Remus’ daughter.”

Severus ignored Virginie’s plea, his face almost rabid. “And don’t think it will end there. When Hermione comes home, I’m also going to reverse my adoption of her.”

Severus once more raised his wand, but before he had a chance to utter a single word, Remus used all the speed he possessed to cover the distance between him and Severus in a single fluid motion. Severus dropped his wand in surprise as Remus grabbed him and threw him to the floor.

Remus knelt down and pulled Severus up by his collar. “Didn’t you hear your wife? Hermione is not my daughter.”

“And why should I believe you or her? She’s a liar. She knew how I felt about you from the moment I first told her about my life; she had the chance to tell me then but she didn’t even mention that she knew you.” Severus bit out.

“Put yourself in her shoes. She was afraid for her daughter.” Remus pointed out.

“I would never have taken it out on her daughter.” Severus argued.

“But you have, Severus.” Virginie stood shakily up. It was at that moment that Remus spotted Virginie’s face.

"I don't care what you think she's done, you don't hit a woman." With that, Remus let fly with his fists.

Virginie screamed and ran over to where Remus now sat atop Severus. "No, Remus, he didn't touch me."

Remus stayed his actions. "Where did the bruise on your face come from then?"

"I tripped on my dress." Virginie lifted the hem of her dress to show the ripped lining where she had caught her heel.

Remus immediately got off Severus and pulled him to his feet. "I saw your face and thought the worst."

Severus wiped away the blood from his face. He knew that he too would have done the same if their positions had been reversed. "I would never lay a finger on my wife, which is more than I can say for you."

"Remus has never laid a hand on me, Severus. If it wasn't for him, I would never have coped when I arrived in England." Virginie defended the man who had once been her lifeline.

"Let me suspend my skepticism for a moment, and say for argument's sake, that I believe you." Severus picked up his wand from the floor and placed it deliberately on the table. "Then you won't mind telling me who Hermione's father is, will you?"

Virginie swallowed hard before answering, her voice shaking. "I don't know."

Severus promptly pointed out the flaw in Virginie's response. "You must know. I heard you telling Lupin that you couldn't tell me because I despised the darker side of our world. So let's try that one more time. Who is Hermione's father?"

Virginie tried to answer and failed. Remus moved across the room and, ignoring Severus' furious look, put his arm around Virginie. "Do you want me to tell him?"

Unable to speak, Virginia nodded.

Remus turned to face Severus. "Your wife doesn't know because she never saw his face."

"What do you mean, she never saw his face?" Severus drawled in a contemptuous voice. "Did he wear a mask while they made love?"

Virginia let out a loud sob, and Severus suddenly understood the reason behind the tormented look on her face. "Oh Merlin, that's exactly why you don't know, isn't it?"

Remus answered for Virginia. "When Virginia turned Lord Voldemort down, he punished her by giving her to his most favored Death Eaters. Let's just say, that lovemaking didn't enter into the equation."

Severus felt his knees buckle and he collapsed onto the floor as the horror of what had happened to Virginia hit him.

Virginia pulled free of Remus and knelt in front of Severus, her voice interspersed with hiccupping sobs. "I'm sorry, I didn't tell you before. But I didn't want you to look at Hermione and hate her for what her father was."

Severus pulled Virginia into his arms. "I'm so sorry, so, so sorry."

Virginia cried softly as Severus rocked her. As her sobs got deeper, Severus picked her up and started to carry her towards their bedroom.

Feeling superfluous, Remus headed for the door, only to be stopped by Severus's voice. "Please wait, Lupin. I want to speak to you."

Remus sighed and sat down. A few minutes later Severus closed the bedroom door and headed towards the drinks cabinet. "Would you like one?"

Remus nodded warily. "Thank you."

Severus poured out two large firewhiskeys, before passing one to Remus. "I want to thank you for what you did for Virginie."

Remus was floored by Severus' thanks. "It was a long time ago."

Severus shook his head. "Not just for then, but for tonight. If it wasn't for you I would have done something terrible to my family."

"Severus, you didn't do it. That's all that matters." Remus had never seen Severus look so broken before.

"But I nearly did." Severus felt awful.

"How did you find out about my knowing Virginie?" Remus diverted the conversation away from the topic of Severus' misplaced anger.

Severus sighed. "My animagus form is a bat."

Remus struggled to hold back a smile, which Severus noticed. "I know; it's ironic isn't it? I'm the one thing I know my students call me." Severus continued. "I saw Virginie going into your rooms and I flew in. I overheard you and her discussing Hermione."

Remus thought back to the conversation. "When did you leave?"

"Just after you told Virginie that you wanted to be responsible for her and the baby." Severus recalled how he felt at that moment and shuddered.

"Then you missed your wife telling me that as it wasn't my baby, then I wasn't responsible for her." Remus took a swig of the firewhiskey and gasped as it burned its way down his throat.

"I could have saved myself three months of grief." Severus shook his head at his own stupidity. He then looked calculating at Remus. "So tell me, if you're not Hermione's father, then how did you meet Virginie?"

Remus thought back.

24th December 1978

Lord Voldemort addressed the assembled room. "I was hoping to announce that my bride-to-be would be joining us for dinner. Instead I do believe she's going to be joining us for a little fun."

Remus forced himself to remain in place as Virginie LeStrange was dragged into the room by two Death Eaters, her blonde locks tumbling messily around her face.

Voldemort turned to the diminutive blonde. "I'm going to give you a choice, my dear. Either accept my offer of marriage, or be prepared to suffer the consequences."

Virginie pulled free of the grasp of the Death Eaters who held her. "You can go to hell."

Voldemort turned his back on his former fiancée. "So be it." He then nodded to the four Death Eaters who flanked him. "She's yours to do with as you please."

Remus felt the man next to him start to pull out his wand. Remus urgently whispered to him. "Don't be so stupid; you can't help her."

The two men stood with the other Death Eaters and watched as the four masked men took turns to impose themselves upon the defenseless woman. When it was over, Voldemort rose from his seat and lifted Virginie's chin so his eyes met her own. "Don't think this is over for you. I'm going to have you back here every night, until every man here has taken his fill of you."

As Virginie was dragged from the room, Voldemort turned back to the assembled Death Eaters. "You would do well to remember what happens when you defy Lord Voldemort." He then swept out of the room.

Remus arose from bowing and headed towards the exit, the man he had stopped from going to Virginie's aid at his side. As soon as they reached the safety of Remus' room, the man pushed Remus aside and headed into the bathroom. Remus could hear him retching and

cast a spell to hide the noise. It wouldn't do for someone to go by and hear the sound.

Remus waited for the man to exit the bathroom. "I'm sorry, but we couldn't do anything."

"But she's little more than a child." The man snapped at Remus.

"Don't you think I know that?" Remus paced the floor. "I'm going to try and get her out before it happens again."

Virginie was lying on her bed, when she heard the door open. Sitting up she saw a man wearing a white Death Eater mask come in. "Come for some private fun, have we?" Virginie picked up the plate of food which lay untouched on the table next to her.

The Death Eater held up his hand. "Don't do that. I'm here to help you."

Virginie lowered the plate, but didn't release it. "Why should I believe you?"

"What do you have to lose?" The man asked. "Now come with me."

Virginie put down the plate and followed the unknown Death Eater out of her room. The guard who had been posted there, simply waved at her, as she went by him. "Imperious." Her rescuer informed her.

"Do you know of any other ways out of here?" The man turned to asked Virginie as they reached the top of the stairs. Their exit was blocked by several Death Eaters who could be seen talking to each other in the foyer below.

Virginie nodded. "Follow me."

Remus watched as she moved to a section of wall where a number of portraits were hanging. He didn't catch what she said, even though he himself spoke fluent French. Virginie turned to Remus. "Take my hand."

Remus did as he was told as Virginia pulled him towards the wall and through it. Virginia hurriedly pulled Remus forward. "This way."

Remus followed Virginia through a twisting maze of corridors until he found himself standing outside. Virginia turned to him. "I've got you out of the house. What now?"

"Take this." Remus passed a small handkerchief to Virginia. "This is a portkey. As soon as we are past the wards it will activate and take you to a safe house. Someone will be there as soon as they can."

Virginia pulled off a small signet ring. "You'll need this. Press it to the second stone on the left and you'll be able to get back in."

A noise startled the two of them. Quickly Remus pulled Virginia out of sight as a Death Eater walked by. As soon as he had gone, Remus indicated that they should go. The two of them ran until Virginia realized that they had reached the limits of the wards as she felt a tingle and then a sharp pull behind her navel. Her rescuer was left behind as she disappeared from sight.

Remus knew he had to hurry back. It wouldn't be long before Virginia's disappearance was discovered. Using his werewolf speed and strength, he quickly covered the distance between the house and the limits of the wards in a few short minutes. On entering the maze, he was once more grateful for his enhanced abilities, as they allowed him to trace his steps back to the entrance he had originally entered the maze from. On arriving back in his room, Remus found his fellow Death Eater sitting on the bed waiting. "Did you get her out?"

Remus nodded. "Thank you. The portkey you created worked exactly as you said it would."

"Perhaps now you'll believe me, when I say that I've had enough with the Dark Lord and his twisted ideals." The man held out his hand.

Remus took it. "I believed you when I saw you were going to help the girl."

Suddenly Remus' arm began to burn. "I think Lord Voldemort has found out that his reluctant bride has gone missing. Let's go."

Present time

"You're a Death Eater." Severus was aghast.

Remus' response was a little sarcastic. "Obviously, Severus."

Severus couldn't believe it. "But you're the last person I could have ever imagined joining the Dark Lord."

Remus could see that Severus didn't truly accept what he was being told so Remus rolled up his left sleeve. After Remus finished dispelling the layered glamours he had previously invoked, Severus was able to see the dark mark in its full glory.

"But why?" Severus' voice came out in almost a whisper.

"There was a war on and I had to choose a side." Remus finished his firewhiskey.

"And you freely chose the Dark Lord?" Severus refilled both glasses and sat back down to hear Remus' answer.

"No. I was inveigled into joining him by someone I trusted." Remus' face was a picture of disgust. "I was told it was for the greater good."

Severus immediately knew who had pushed Remus into joining but couldn't say anything against him. "So you were a spy?"

Remus nodded. "Unfortunately I only had access to lower level Death Eaters. The Dark Lord didn't trust me as I was considered a dark creature."

"He didn't trust anyone." Severus pointed out.

"I think he did though." Remus remembered back. "There were always four Death Eaters who followed him around like a Centurion

Guard. Their masks were silver, not white. I believe these were his most trusted advisors.”

Severus paled. “A silver mask? Can you describe it?”

Remus nodded. “Yes. It was silver with a snake embossed on the front.”

“I think I may know who one of them is.” Severus confessed.

Remus raised an eyebrow. “How?”

Severus spoke several spells over his left arm, before rolling up his sleeve to reveal the partially finished dark mark. “I met Virginie when I was a recruit. My partner that night killed Virginie’s husband. I saved both Virginie and Hermione after my sponsor set their house alight. I was supposed to make my first kill that night in order to be allowed to join the Dark Lord’s ranks. My sponsor wore a silver mask.”

“But all sponsors wear a silver mask.” Remus pointed out.

Severus had been aware of that. “But do all sponsors wear a silver mask with a snake embossed on them?”

Remus sucked in his breath. “No, they don’t.”

Severus’ face hardened. “I’m going to kill him.”

“Who?” Remus wanted to know the identity of Severus’ patron.

“Lucius Malfoy.” Severus snarled.

“But Minerva checked him for a Dark Mark. There wasn’t one.” Remus informed Severus.

“But it has to have been him. I saw his hair in the moonlight. No-one else has hair that color.” Severus was now pacing the floor.

“Are you sure?” Remus asked.

Severus nodded. "Absolutely."

"But I still don't see how he can be a Death Eater. He doesn't have the mark and we can do little to prove otherwise." Remus sounded frustrated. "I also never saw him at any Death Eater meetings."

"I didn't think that anyone removed their masks." Severus had been told by his sponsor that under no circumstances was he ever to remove his mask.

"Some did; usually those who didn't care who knew they were a Death Eater." Remus informed Severus. "Bellatrix Lestrange was a prime example."

Severus stood up and stretched. "Mask or no, I'm going to find out who did this to my wife, and if one of them turns out to be Malfoy, then Merlin help him."

Remus felt drained. "I think I need some fresh air."

Severus put down his glass. "Let me just check that Virginie is still asleep and I'll join you."

Remus waited as Severus went into the bedroom. He still couldn't believe that the two of them were having an almost pleasant conversation. In the bedroom, Severus was thinking the same thing.

"She's still sleeping. I thought she would, as I've given her a large dose of sleeping potion. She should be out until tomorrow morning." Severus led Remus away from the entrance to his rooms. "There's a door to the grounds at the back of my rooms."

The two men emerged onto the grounds and drank in the cool, crisp air. "That feels good."

Severus held out his hand. "Remus. I owe you a life debt on behalf of my wife and Hermione."

Remus didn't take his hand. "Severus, you owe me nothing. I had to stand by unable to do anything while your wife was raped. If I'd saved her then, then perhaps I would have accepted your offer."

Severus understood but still kept his hand held out. "In that case, I'd like to thank you for taking care of her."

This time Remus accepted Severus' hand. "I did what any decent person would have done."

Hidden in the grass, the small rat watched as Remus and Snape shook hands. Peter couldn't believe it. Why would Remus befriend Snivellus? Determined to find out, the rat followed the two men silently.

December 28th 1993

Harry was bored. Cho sat across from him chattering away about the Tutshill Tornados. While Harry liked quidditch, he didn't eat, sleep and live for it in quite the same way Jamie, and now apparently, Cho, did.

"So Harry, what do you think?" Cho looked expectantly at Harry.

"About what?" Harry had lost the thread of the conversation.

"The Tornados' chances of winning the league next year." Cho frowned. "You weren't listening were you?"

Harry sighed. "I'm sorry, my mind wandered for a moment."

"Jamie would have listened." Cho snapped.

Harry was getting fed up of hearing about what Jamie would or wouldn't have done. "Then perhaps you shouldn't have dumped him."

Cho's face fell. "I offered to take him back. It was your brother who didn't want me."

"It sure didn't look like it when he was using my face as his punching bag." Harry reminded Cho.

"Do you really think he still likes me?" Cho sounded hopeful.

Harry couldn't believe the girl. She was supposed to be out on a date with him, and all she had done was go on about his brother. It was at that moment that Harry realized what an idiot he'd been. "Yes, I do, if his actions on Christmas Eve were anything to go by."

Cho was eager to find out what had happened. "What did he do?"

Harry had had enough. "Cho, I suggest you ask himself." He stood up. "May I see you to the floo?"

Cho knew that her brief sojourn with Harry was over. "Thank you, Harry."

Harry walked Cho to the fireplace in the Leaky Cauldron and paid for her floo charge. "I don't think we'll be doing this again, do you?"

Cho shook her head and took a handful of floo powder before turning to face Harry. "I'd still like to be friends though."

Just wanting to be rid of her, Harry agreed. "That's fine. I'll see you at school."

Cho nodded before throwing down her floo powder as she called out her destination.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief as Cho disappeared from view. He grinned to himself as he wondered if she would actually ask Jamie; he hoped she did. But he couldn't see Jamie telling her the truth.

Harry shook his head as he thought about how Jamie had hit him after overhearing Harry telling Lily about the date he had set up with Cho. When Lily had pulled Jamie off Harry, Jamie had threatened to remove a certain part of Harry's anatomy in a most painful way if he ever went near Cho again.

Harry of course had told Jamie to go to hell and that he'd see whomever he wanted to. The only problem was that this time, when Jamie tried to lash out at Harry, his fist had caught Lily, who'd been holding on to him just as Sirius came walking up the corridor and into the room. Jamie had been treated to a tongue-lashing from Sirius to which he had answered back earning himself a spanking. Even though Sirius hadn't smacked Jamie hard enough to hurt him, he achieved his intention of humiliating Jamie in front of his younger siblings. Jamie had promptly run off to his room, putting a damper on the entire evening.

Unfortunately for Harry, Sirius had heard Harry goading Jamie and Harry too had been treated to a tongue-lashing by Sirius. The only difference was that Harry had immediately apologized for his poor manners and behavior, rather than mouthing off at Sirius. Anna, of course, had sided with Jamie and had spent the evening upstairs with her brother. Cassie and Orion had stayed close to Harry and said that their brother was stupid, and that they didn't like Cho anyway.

All in all, the evening hadn't been one of the best in the world for Harry, and he'd been glad to escape back home.

Aware that he had just been standing there and people were beginning to stare, Harry collected his own handful of floo powder and stepped into the fireplace. He was returning to Luna's house, as Nia hated anyone using the fireplace for flooing; it made too much dust on her carpet.

Luna looked up as Harry stumbled out of the fireplace, his face set in a scowl. "Didn't go too well, Harry?"

Harry snorted. "I don't know what I ever saw in her."

Luna hid her smile. She'd known that the two of them weren't going to last long.

Harry continued with his rant. "All she did was babble on about her dresses, Jamie, her shoes, Jamie, quidditch and Jamie."

"I take it she mentioned Jamie?" Luna didn't bother to hide her smile this time.

Harry sat down at the table with Luna. "I don't know why she even bothered to go out with me."

"To make Jamie jealous, of course." Luna correctly pointed out.

"Great, so I've wasted an afternoon and ten galleons on someone who was never really interested in me in the first place." Harry bashed his head on the table several times. "The next time I even glance at a pretty girl, slap me."

Luna laughed out loud. "You'll get over it. At least you won't have to worry about Cho any more. She'll probably go back to Jamie now."

"And he's welcome to her." Harry propped his chin up with his hands, thinking about his brother.

Luna squeezed Harry's hand. "Don't let it get to you."

Harry groaned. "It's hard not to though. I have no luck with girls. I petrified one girlfriend and the other didn't really want me."

Luna decided to tease Harry a little. "And you turned me down. I would have made a wonderful girlfriend you know."

Harry look abashed. "Sorry, Luna."

"I'm not." Luna grinned. "Dudley adores me. He thinks I'm a princess."

Harry grinned back at her in spite of his woes. "You're so right, and he seems to know you so well." For Christmas Dudley had bought Luna a bright yellow tee-shirt with 'My Little Crumple-Horned Snorkack' printed on it. Luna had been delighted with the gift.

"Hermione likes you." Luna suddenly informed Harry. "And I know you like her."

"But..." Harry's words trailed off. "How did you find out?"

“Hermione told me.” Luna filled Harry in.

“Did she also tell you about her wedding contract?” Harry asked.

Hermione hadn’t, so Luna shook her head. “She’ll probably never marry Felidae you know; they’re so obviously not right for each other. You could be wasting a wonderful opportunity.”

Harry shook his head. “I can’t Luna. It just wouldn’t be right.”

“Harry, Hermione was really upset when she saw you kissing Cho at the Ball.” Luna decided to try and give her friend a push back towards Hermione.

Harry pulled a face. “She didn’t seem that upset when I saw her cosying up to her fiancé in the garden. You should have seen the dagger she gave him for his birthday. He was all over her like a rash after she gave it to him.”

Hermione hadn’t told Luna about that part. “Perhaps he was just comforting her.”

Harry sniffed disdainfully. “Yeah right.”

Luna decided that she wasn’t going to get anywhere. “Harry, if that’s true, then just forget about her.”

“I already have.” Harry lied. “In fact I’m going to forget about girls altogether.”

Luna shook her head. “Oh Harry. You are funny.”

Harry got up. “I’ve got to get home. Mum’s expecting me to help with dinner.”

“I know, Uncle G and I are coming round.” Luna smiled sweetly at Harry. “Well, off you go then.”

Harry stuck his tongue out at Luna as he walked out of the door.

Nia looked up as Harry walked in. "Harry, you're a little earlier than I expected. Is everything alright?"

"Not really. Cho wasn't really interested in me. She was just going out with me to upset Jamie." Harry informed his mother.

"Well, better you find out now." Nia patted Harry on the cheek. "Your Dad is in his study if you want to go say hello."

Harry shook his head. "Not right now. I'll be in my room."

Harry left the kitchen and headed upstairs.

Nia sighed exasperatedly, and shaking her head, purposefully followed her son.

Harry looked up as his mother knocked and came into his room. "I think it's time we had a little chat."

Harry wondered what he'd done wrong. "Is something up?"

"Harry, you can't keep ignoring your Dad." Nia began, only for Harry to interrupt her.

"But he treated you like dirt, Mum." Harry protested.

"You're right, he did. However, you can't keep on punishing him like this." Nia told Harry.

Harry's face took on a stubborn look.

Nia continued. "Harry, do you love your Dad?"

Harry reluctantly nodded.

"And he loves you too. It's killing him that you won't talk to him. Do you have any idea what he's going through seeing you in class day after day, knowing that you won't have anything to do with him?" Nia tried to get Harry to see Remus' point of view.

“But what he did was awful, Mum. How can you still speak to him?” Harry asked her for the first time.

“Because I care about him. I’ll always care about him. He’s the father of my children, and I want him to have a part in their lives.” Nia stroked Harry’s hair. “And I don’t want your lives to be blighted by your Dad and I always arguing and taking potshots at each other. It’s counterproductive and unhealthy.”

Harry knew his Mum was right, but he was still finding it difficult to let go. Her next words however, shocked him. “Dudley knows too. He told me a few days before Christmas.”

“But he’s still speaking to Dad.” Harry sounded shaken.

“Dudley and I had a long chat, when Dudley admitted to me that he had known what was going on for almost as long as you had.” Nia told Harry.

Harry couldn’t believe it. “But Dudley never said anything to me.”

“He hoped that it would all blow over. On the night Remus told you all about the divorce, that was why Dudley ran after you, but you didn’t want to talk about it.” Nia explained.

Harry turned to his Mum. “Can I have a few minutes alone, please?”

Nia nodded. “Think about what I said, Harry. Your Dad made a mistake. Yes, it was a big one, but look at what’s it cost him.”

“He deserves it.” Harry’s protest sounded half-hearted to Nia.

“Harry, I’ll be downstairs if you want me.” Nia left Harry to his thoughts.

Remus was packing up the last of his books, when a knock sounded on the door. “Harry, what can I do for you?”

“Mum said that Dudley knows about what you did.” Harry blurted out, not quite sure of where to start.

Remus nodded to the door, which Harry closed behind him. “Dudley does. He spoke at length with your Mum, and then with me when he stayed at Hogwarts on Christmas Eve.”

Harry frowned. “But he’s forgiven you, hasn’t he?”

“Sort of. He punched me in the face during our conversation.” Remus informed Harry.

“And you let him?” Harry was stunned.

“It was Dudley’s way of letting me know how he felt about my treatment of his mother.” Remus put down the books he was holding. “Harry, I am sorry for what I did but I can’t do anything now to change things.”

“Would you still have done the same if you could turn back the clock?” Harry asked.

Remus answered honestly. “I don’t know.”

Harry shuffled uncomfortably as Remus knelt in front of him. “Harry, I understand why you haven’t wanted to talk to me, and I respect that, but I’ve missed you. It’s getting harder and harder for me to keep my distance when I have to see you in class every week. Harry, I’d like for you to at least think about giving me another chance. Please?”

Harry looked directly into Remus’ eyes for the first time in months. “Mum asked if I still loved you.”

Remus felt his stomach flop over. “And do you?”

Harry didn’t answer and Remus felt his heart sink. Suddenly Harry launched himself forward into Remus’ arms, surprising Remus.

Harry stayed like that for a few moments more, before pulling back and wiping his eyes. “Are you staying for dinner?”

Remus realized that Harry didn't want to discuss what had gone on anymore. "No, I've got to get back to school. Severus is expecting me."

Harry's head shot up at the mention of Severus' name. "But I thought you and he didn't get on."

"Things change." Remus informed Harry. "Would you like to come with me? Hermione's going to be around."

Harry debated for a moment before nodding. "I'd like that." His face suddenly fell. "Mum's expecting me to help get dinner ready."

"I'm sure she'll let you get away with it this once." Remus put his hand on Harry's shoulder and led him out of the study. "Nia, do you mind if I take Harry up to the school with me?"

Nia turned from the sauce she was making. "Is he going to stay there overnight?"

Remus looked at Harry, who nodded. "I think that would be a yes."

"There's a clean pair of pyjamas in the laundry room." Nia pointed to the door. "Don't forget your toothbrush."

Harry grinned. "No, Mum."

At Hogwarts

Severus yawned as he stirred the Wolfsbane he had been experimenting with. Up until the previous night, Remus had been taking the standard mixture. Severus had, however, tweaked this latest batch in an effort to try and help with the pain that Remus would go through during the change. Hearing a quiet knock on the door, Severus called for whoever it was to come in.

Hermione poked her head around the door. "Harry and Professor Lupin are here, Papa."

Severus bestowed a warm smile on his daughter. "Thanks, Hermione. Can you send them in?"

Hermione nodded before turning to leave. Severus' voice brought her to a halt. "You can come back as well. You might be interested in this latest batch of Wolfsbane I'm brewing for Remus."

"Thank you." Hermione left the room. She didn't know what had happened, but ever since Christmas Day, her father had been back to his usual self.

Harry and Remus were in the sitting room, talking to Virginie and Bas. "Where's Livvy gone to?"

"She's playing with Dominic in his room." Virginie smiled.

Hermione thought that her mother looked a little tired. "Can I do anything?"

Virginie shook her head. "Not right now."

Hermione turned to Remus. "Papa has said that we can all go in now."

Harry followed Hermione and looked in interest at Severus' private potions lab.

Severus smiled at Harry. "I trust you are well, Harry."

Harry nodded.

Severus immediately got down to business. "I've included extract of the yucca plant root in this batch. It doesn't affect the other ingredients and is known to reduce inflammation and spasmodic pain. If it doesn't help, then I have a few other ingredients I can try next time."

"Thanks, Severus. I'm willing to try anything." Remus looked into the cauldron. "Is that it?"

Severus nodded. "It just needs to simmer for another hour."

Hermione was fascinated. "What about cat's claw, Papa?"

Severus was pleased at Hermione's suggestion. "It's one of the ingredients I may try next time, if this one doesn't help."

Harry frowned. "But I thought cat's claw was toxic."

"You're talking about *Acacia greggi*, which is toxic. The plant I am proposing to use is *Uncaria tomentosa*." Severus informed Harry.

Virginie stuck her head around the door. "Does anyone want something to drink?"

Severus looked to the others who nodded. "Butterbeers for the children, I think, and tea for myself and Remus."

Virginie disappeared again to instruct Salty, as a slightly uncomfortable silence fell on the group.

Hermione decided to restart the conversation. "Did you have a nice Christmas, Harry?"

Harry scowled. "Not exactly. I stayed at Maman's on Christmas Eve and got into another fight with Jamie."

"Over Cho?" Hermione had to know.

"Yes. He punched me and threatened to remove a very personal piece of me if I saw her again." Harry grinned. "He got a good paddling from Sirius after he accidentally hit Maman."

"Harry, someone else's disgrace is not something to be made fun of." Remus berated his son.

Looking embarrassed, Harry apologized. "Sorry, Dad."

Severus turned to the two children. "Why don't you go for a walk? I need to talk to Remus."

Hermione did as she was bidden and led Harry out of the room. Her Mum was in the sitting room with the drinks Severus had asked for. "I take it your father wants a little privacy?"

Hermione nodded. "Can I take the butterbeers and sit in my room with Harry?"

Virginie passed the butterbeers to Hermione before warning her. "Please keep your door open."

Hermione rolled her eyes slightly as she led Harry into her room, and passed him a bottle. "So, have you seen Cho again?"

"We went out on a date this afternoon." Harry sat down. "Have you seen Venant again?"

Hermione nodded. "He came to dinner last night."

Both children fell silent until Harry finally spoke up. "I've finished with Cho."

"Why?"

"All she wanted to do was talk about Jamie." Harry told her.

"I'm sorry Harry." Hermione wasn't; she was secretly pleased that it hadn't worked out between the two of them.

"It's no big deal." Harry took a sip of his butterbeer.

"I noticed you called Professor Lupin, Dad. Have you made up?" Hermione hoped that Harry had.

Harry nodded. "A little bit."

Hermione seemed pleased. "I'm glad. It'll make Defense lessons a little less stressful."

Harry pulled a face at his friend. "Speaking of lessons, have you done your runes homework yet?"

Hermione nodded. "Yes, but I'm not sure about..."

The two friends fell into a spirited conversation about the positioning of lagu when combined with sigel until Remus came into the room. "Harry, do you want to come to my rooms for a while? I've got about an hour before I need to leave."

Harry got up. "Do you want to go over the astronomy homework in the morning?"

Hermione looked apologetically at Harry. "I can't. I'm going to the Ministry with Felidae."

Harry's face fell. "I'll see you at school then."

Remus butted in. "You'll actually see her on New Year's Eve. Severus and Virginie have invited a few people over, which includes you."

Hermione turned to Harry. "Luna's coming."

Harry thought for a moment. As much as he wanted to say no, he knew that he wasn't going to. "Thank you."

Remus then led Harry out of the dungeons and towards his rooms.

New Year's Eve

Dudley yelled out to his mum. "I'm just going to collect Luna. I'll be back in a minute."

Harry watched as Dudley shot out of the front door, leaving it open. Seeing Dudley go out, Scarlett ran up to her favorite brother, and jumped onto his lap. "Harry, don't you want to stay with me?"

"I can't. I've..." Harry's excuse was forgotten as Scarlett was pulled off Harry's lap by a familiar figure.

Harry drew his wand. "Let her go."

Peter shook his head and pressed the knife he was holding more firmly against Scarlett's neck. "I need some insurance."

Remus chose that moment to arrive to collect Harry and the others. "Peter, put my daughter down."

Scarlett began to struggle at the sight of her father. "Daddy."

Remus growled low in his throat and started to move towards Peter.

"Stay where you are Remus." Peter didn't remove the knife, and held onto Scarlett more firmly. "I need you to listen to me."

"Let her go and I promise I'll listen to whatever you have to say." Remus edged a little closer.

Peter shook his head. "I don't believe you."

Engaged in his conversation with Remus, Peter didn't hear the man approaching him from behind until he felt a wand digging in his neck. A voice hissed in Peter's ear. "Shall I save the Dementors a job and just Avada Kedavra you now?"

Peter dropped the knife and let go of Scarlett. Nia dashed forward and picked up her weeping daughter, carrying her out of the room.

Remus grabbed Peter by his hair and pulled his head back. "Give me one good reason why I shouldn't rip your throat out right now?"

Harry had never heard his Dad sound so feral before and, from the look on Peter's face, neither had he.

"Please, Remus. I was desperate." Peter pleaded.

Felidae looked to Remus. "What do you want to do?"

"I think we have need of Severus and his potions." Remus smiled cruelly at Peter as he kept a tight grip on his hair. "Don't think of changing either. I promise you that if you do, I won't hesitate to track you down and kill you."

Peter shivered at what he knew wasn't an empty threat. The two men then disappeared from sight.

Harry turned to Felidae, who was getting ready to apparate. "I want to go with you."

"This doesn't concern you Harry." Felidae responded.

"This is the second time that man has attacked one of us. I'm coming." Harry sounded determined.

"Fine. But keep quiet." Felidae took Harry by the arm and apparated them both away.

Harry opened his eyes as they landed. He had expected to find himself outside Hogwarts' gates. "Where are we?"

"What did I tell you?" Felidae barked out. "Shut up and follow me."

Harry's mouth fell open as they emerged from the tunnel into a large cavern. Dim lamplight lit up the cavern's ceiling which glowed brightly as the lamplight hit the phosphorus covering the roof. Forgetting what Felidae had told him, Harry went to open his mouth to ask about the cavern, only to receive a glowering look from Felidae.

Ten minutes after they had arrived, Remus and Severus walked into the cavern. "What's Harry doing here?"

Felidae shrugged. "He wanted to come."

"And he's going home right now." Remus started to march towards Harry.

"No, Dad. I'm staying." Harry's face took on a tenacious look.

Remus stood his ground. "Harry, I don't want you involved in this."

Harry shook his head stubbornly and pointed at Pettigrew. "That thing attacked me and attacked my sister. I'm not going anywhere."

Severus spoke up. "Let him stay."

Remus turned on Severus. "You can't be serious."

"If Harry thinks he is up to it, then he can stay." Severus turned to Harry. "But once we begin, we won't be stopping to take you home."

Harry swallowed hard. He was just beginning to get some idea of exactly what was about to take place. "I'm staying."

Remus looked at Severus. "I hope you know what you're doing."

"I do." Severus then cast a privacy spell, locking Harry and Peter out. "I'm more interested in what Felidae is doing here."

Felidae answered cryptically. "Let's just say I have a vested interest in what goes on."

"And I'm just supposed to trust you?" Severus asked.

Remus looked at Felidae, who nodded. "Severus, he was the Death Eater who helped get Virginie out."

Severus was surprised. "Then I owe you my thanks, but I still don't understand why you are here."

"I'm in charge of tracking down and bringing to justice any free Death Eaters." Felidae explained. "I need to find out if Pettigrew is one or not."

Severus continued to question Felidae. "You work for the Ministry?"

"Seeing as I took your daughter there a few days ago, then I would think the answer would be yes." Felidae was growing a little annoyed at Severus' delay in getting on with things.

Severus felt a little silly. "I just thought it was a date and that Hermione had asked to see it."

"A date to the Ministry?" Felidae shook his head in amazement.

"Well, what else do you expect me to think? You are going to marry her after all." Severus snapped at the man.

"Severus, I have no intention of marrying Hermione; I never did." Felidae knew it probably wasn't the best time to discuss his marriage offer but he thought he may as well lay all of his cards on the table in one go. "She's in love with Harry."

"Harry, as in your Harry?" Severus turned to Remus, who nodded.

"Felidae offered to marry Hermione as a favor and to offset a life debt he owed to me. If he hadn't, then Harry would have offered in his place and, as much as your daughter is a lovely girl, I couldn't allow Harry to tie himself down at such an early age." Remus winced at the look on Severus' face.

"So my daughter thinks..." Severus began but stopped as Felidae held up his hand.

"Hermione knows. I told her from the very start. We're just friends, Severus, nothing more." Felidae sighed. "Look, this isn't the time to be discussing Hermione and Harry. We have a prisoner to interrogate, and I for one, want to get on with it. So are you in, or are you out?"

Severus turned to look at Pettigrew who was watching with them with increasing trepidation. "Oh, I'm definitely in."

"So the usual way then?" Remus asked Felidae.

Felidae shook his head. "I think we should go about this a little differently."

Harry watched frustrated as the three men conversed; the privacy bubble blurring their images slightly so he couldn't see them clearly,

nor could he hear what they were talking about. He wondered what they were discussing. He knew that whatever it was, it probably didn't bode well for Peter. A few moments later, the privacy bubble was dropped and the three men advanced on the vulnerable figure that stood limply, chained against the wall.

"I'm going to give you one chance to come clean with us, Pettigrew, before things turn nasty." Remus' eyes, still amber from his earlier rush of anger, gleamed in the lamplight. "Did you kill James Potter?"

Peter shook his head. "I swear I didn't do it."

Felidae joined in. "But you gave them up to Lord Voldemort didn't you?"

Peter shook his head again. "I didn't."

Remus retook the lead from Felidae. "But you admitted to being the Potters' secret keeper."

Peter hung his head and didn't answer.

Felidae smacked Peter across the face, making Harry wince. "So tell us, were you their secret keeper or not?"

"I was but I swear I didn't give them up to You-Know-Who." Peter strained at his chains in an effort to get out.

Remus laughed. It wasn't a nice laugh though; it was a malicious laugh meant to intimidate. "Pull as hard as you want Peter. I've had bigger and braver Death Eaters in here. Now, let me think about how many have escaped." Remus turned to Felidae. "Can you remember?"

Felidae smirked. "Err." Felidae scratched his head as if trying to remember. "That's right, none."

Peter tried to kick Felidae, who just waved his finger at Peter. "Naughty, naughty."

“Now come on Peter.” Remus stood just out of range of Peter’s feet, as he questioned the small man. “Did you or didn’t you give the Potters up to the Dark Lord?”

“I didn’t. I swear, I didn’t.” Peter’s voice held a thread of desperation as he squealed his response.

Severus finally joined in, his voice silky and hypnotic. “If you did, you could tell us, you know. We’d understand. After all, we’re all friends together aren’t we?”

“Wha... what do you mean?” Peter’s voice shook as he spoke. For some reason, he felt more afraid of his Hogwarts nemesis than of the other two.

Severus rolled up his left sleeve before nodding to the other two men who rolled up their sleeves as well. All three held out their arms in front of Peter’s face. “See Peter, we’re just one big happy family.”

Next chapter: The spotlight falls on Peter.

The next chapter may be a while in coming; I haven't gotten much further than a vague outline, but I'll post as soon as I can.

Chapter 33: Peter and Harry Have A Very Bad Evening

Upon seeing Remus' dark mark, Peter's face relaxed and he burst out laughing. "Nice illusion, Remus. Your plan to intimidate me would have been a little more successful if you hadn't attempted to pass yourself off as a Death Eater. The other two I'd believe; but you? Please, give me a break."

"How can you be so sure that I'm not a Death Eater?" Remus paced slowly in front of Peter, who was now looking totally unafraid of his old school friend.

"If you were a Death Eater you wouldn't be using this cave to imprison other Death Eaters; you'd be using it to hold those who fought against You-Know-Who." Peter sounded confident in his own deduction. "And everyone knows that You-Know-Who would never enlist a werewolf."

Remus shook his head. "Nice theory but you're wrong."

Felidae decided it was time for him to join in. "Do you have any idea what this place was used for?"

Peter shrugged nonchalantly. "I don't know; tea parties perhaps?"

Felidae laughed. "Let me give you a clue. What happens if you've been a naughty boy?"

"Don't tell me. You-Know-Who liked to spank his Death Eaters here." Peter was now leaning casually against the wall, his tone bordering on insolent.

Remus' face took on a dark look. "I wouldn't joke about things you know nothing about."

Peter couldn't believe that Remus actually expected him to buy into his bullshit. "Come on, Remus. You can't expect me to believe anything you've told me. You show me a false dark mark, try to imply this room was some sort of torture chamber, and then glower at me as if I'm a little kid who's done something wrong."

Remus shoved his arm closer to Peter's face; the dark mark little more than two inches away. "Take a good look, Peter. This IS a dark mark and I AM a Death Eater.

Peter shook his head. "Whatever you say, Remus. Nothing you say will make me believe you."

"Perhaps you'll believe this then." Remus aimed his wand and, thinking about how Peter had held Scarlett against her will, spoke determinedly. "Crucio."

Peter screamed and writhed, tearing at the chains in an effort to escape from the pain being inflicted upon him.

Remus released the spell. "Do you believe me now?"

Peter didn't answer and just wept.

Harry couldn't believe that he'd seen his Dad cast an unforgiveable. He too, like Peter, had believed that Remus was only masquerading. Now he didn't quite know what to believe, and he was willing to bet that neither did Peter.

"So are you going to tell me what I want to know?" Remus asked quietly.

"I didn't kill James. I don't know how You-Know-Who found him. I don't." Peter sniveled, his earlier bravado having completely vanished. "You've got to believe me."

"But we haven't got to believe you." Felidae drove his fist into Peter's stomach causing him to collapse to his knees.

"I DIDN'T DO IT" Peter screamed angrily out of fear.

"That's not good enough." Felidae stepped backwards and pulled out his wand. "I'm afraid I don't believe you. I think you need a little more persuasion."

“Please no.” Peter begged, not wanting to be placed under the cruciatus curse again.

Felidae raised his wand and brought it down in a slashing motion causing Peter to scream as a line of fire appeared across his chest. Felidae checked on his handiwork, then coldly continued to repeat the motion again and again until Peter’s chest was ablaze with a myriad of flaming cuts.

Remus and Severus watched impassively as Peter sobbed pitifully, snot and tears blending in with the sweat that was now running down his face.

Harry felt sickened. He couldn’t believe that his Dad and Severus could just stand by while Felidae desecrated Peter’s body. Harry wanted to scream at them; to beg them to stop him but he knew that his words wouldn’t sway them. Severus had warned him and he’d refused to listen, stupidly thinking that he could deal with anything they threw at Peter; he was wrong. Gritting his teeth, Harry tried to look anywhere other than at Peter but nothing could drown out of the sounds of his screaming and begging. Harry was relieved when his Dad finally spoke up. “That’s enough.”

“Now do you want to try telling me again? Why did you give James up to the Dark Lord?” Remus summoned a chair from the side of the cavern so that he could sit down in front of Peter.

“I swear I didn’t.” Peter was sick of repeating himself.

“But you were his secret keeper?” Felidae summoned a table towards him and leant casually against it.

Peter nodded reluctantly. “But I didn’t give him up to You-Know-Who.”

“But I’m afraid we don’t believe you.” Severus opined, as though he was teaching his students. “You see, the word among those who are loyal to the Dark Lord is that you couldn’t wait to tell him; that you were hoping for your moment in the spotlight; that you wanted to pay James Potter back for all those times he made you feel like nothing.”

"If that's true, then why aren't I admitting to it now?" Peter snarled, fear spurring him to anger.

"I wouldn't want to admit that it was information that I provided that led to the downfall of our beloved Lord and Master." Felidae smiled nastily. "Now would I?"

Peter felt trapped. At first he'd thought that Remus had been angry at James' death; now he wasn't so sure. "What do you want me to say? That I did it? Well I didn't. You can all go to hell."

Remus yawned. "Wrong answer, Petey."

"Don't do you dare fucking call me Petey." Peter roared.

"I'll call you whatever I like." Remus taunted the chained man. "Now why don't you like being called Petey? Isn't that what your mother used to call you?"

Peter pulled at his chains trying to get to Remus. "Leave my mother out of this."

"Did I tell you I know where she is?" Remus got up from his chair and walked over to Peter.

"I don't believe you." Peter hoped he was right.

"It was so good of you to pick such a nice place to put her in. The garden overlooking the lake where the residents can sit outside is delightful." Remus sighed as if remembering somewhere exquisite.

"You could be talking about anywhere." Peter sounded nervous.

"You're entirely correct; I could be." Remus moved to lean back against the table.

Severus picked up the thread from Remus. "That's what I've always like about you, Pettigrew. You're always getting things right. It's almost like being back at school where you showed off your remarkable brains and talent." Severus snapped his fingers, and

sneered at Peter. "Oh wait a minute. That wasn't you was it? That was James Potter; the one person you idolized but could never do enough to please."

Peter didn't hesitate to strike back. "You should know how that feels, Snivellus. Forever sniffing around Lily Evans. Poor Severus; how did it feel to want someone who didn't want you?"

"Who said she didn't want me?" Severus looked supremely confident.

"She'd never have let you touch her." Peter mocked. "No decent woman in their right mind would."

Severus slapped Peter across the face. "Remind me to introduce you to my wife before you die."

"Lovely woman." Felidae interjected. "She makes us look like angels. Did you ever meet any of the Dark Lord's Lieutenants?"

Believing Severus' wife was one of the rumored Lieutenants that Voldemort had had, Peter blanched and shut up.

Remus turned to Severus. "Have you two finished playing with Petey?"

Felidae just grinned, so Remus continued. "Now where was I? Oh, yes, your mother." Remus shook his head. "Such a shame."

Becoming unnerved, Peter screamed at Remus. "You have no idea where she is, you lying piece of shit."

Walking right up to Peter and looking him in the eye, Remus smiled evilly. "That's a lovely silver framed photo of her only son sitting on the French dressing table in front of the window."

Peter's face collapsed. "Please no, not my mother. What's she ever done to you?"

"Nothing but I really don't care." Remus shrugged. "If that's what it takes to get you talk then..."

"Please, please believe me. I didn't give James up to You-Know-Who." Peter begged, afraid for his mother.

Remus looked at Felidae. "Do you believe him?"

Felidae shook his head. "Not really."

Peter began to cry in earnest. "Please leave my mother alone. She doesn't know anything."

"I have no intention of getting information from your mother." Remus informed Peter. "I was just going to bring her here to join you. I'm sure she'd enjoy it."

"What have I got to do to prove my innocence to you?" Peter screamed frustratedly, missing the grin that Felidae flashed at Remus.

As Peter screamed out his anger at Remus, a flash of light blinded Harry causing him to close his eyes. When he opened them again, he found himself standing in a room where a man who looked a lot Peter stood chained to a wall facing a boy whom Harry instantly recognized. Harry wondered why the two of them hadn't reacted to his appearance. His question was answered when the boy walked straight through him. Harry realized that he must have somehow fallen into one of his visions.

Pettigrew was speaking to the boy who had moved to stand directly in front of the chained man.

"What have I got to do to prove my innocence to you?" Unlike the Pettigrew his father was torturing, this Pettigrew drawled his words out in a casually affected way. "That's right. I don't have to do anything because why deny it? She enjoyed what I did to her; they always do."

Harry wondered how much of the conversation he had missed as he watched the boy in front of him pull out a small dagger and slash Pettigrew across his face, not stopping until he drew a scream from

Pettigrew. Harry then noticed that this Pettigrew had a shiny silver hand.

A young woman came into the room. "Is he talking yet?"

Pettigrew leered at the woman as he answered her question. "I'm telling Potter all about his lovely wife, and what I did to her."

The boy punched Pettigrew in face as he answered the young woman. "I've haven't really asked him anything yet, Herms."

Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing. The boy who stood in front of him couldn't have been much older than 15 or 16; how could he have been married? Deciding to call this alternate version of himself 'Potter' in his mind, Harry watched as the action unfolded.

Pettigrew taunted Potter. "You'll never get any information out of me. The Dark Lord will destroy you in the same way he destroyed your wife."

Putting down the knife, Potter picked up a small bottle and held it up to Wormtail's face. "Do you know what this is Wormtail?"

Wormtail shook his head.

"Well, I'd hate to spoil the surprise then." Potter unscrewed the lid to reveal a glass pipette which he filled with some of the liquid from the bottle. "Open up Wormtail."

Wormtail shook his head, as Herms withdrew her wand. Potter stopped her. "No, I prefer to do this the hard way."

Potter picked up the dagger which he had relinquished earlier and moved towards Wormtail. "Either you open up or pick an eye."

Wormtail did neither, so Potter sighed and asked. "Last chance, left or right?" Wormtail didn't respond.

Potter shrugged. "It didn't have to be like this." Seeing the look on Potter's face, Wormtail struggled to free himself as the boy cast

'Petrificus' on Wormtail's upper torso, just leaving his lower half mobile.

Harry had to struggle to hold down his lunch as his look-a-like calmly took the knife and removed Wormtail's left eye, as Wormtail, unable to make a sound or move from the waist upwards, tried to dislodge the boy by kicking out with his legs.

What horrified Harry even more was that Herms just sat on the table indifferently filing her nails. After Potter released Wormtail from the spell, Herms jumped down off the table and approached him. "My turn."

Herms pulled out her wand and cast a spell Harry had never heard before. Nothing happened for a while, as Wormtail just moaned and clutched his face, then suddenly he began to scream and beg for release.

Potter grinned in a grim fashion at his female companion. "Nice spell. Let's see how he likes reliving my nightmares."

After five minutes of screaming, Herms dropped the spell. "Your screams were beginning to annoy me."

Until today, Harry couldn't believe that anyone could be so cold and callous towards another human being.

Wormtail looked up at Herms, his blood encrusted eye socket looking grotesque in his face. "Fuck you, mudblood."

Potter didn't hesitate and kicked Wormtail between the legs causing the ratty looking man to collapse to his knees. "Don't you ever insult my friend like that again."

Wormtail spat at Potter's feet. "Fuck you too, Potter."

Potter ignored the man and picked up the glass container he had previously threatened Wormtail with. As he did so, the door opened and Severus walked in. Harry immediately recognized this Severus as the man from his visions.

“Harry, I see you’ve begun without me.” Severus didn’t bat an eyelid at the state of Wormtail’s face.

“Sorry, Father.” Potter didn’t look sorry.

Severus sat down. “Have you found out anything about where he’s holding the werewolf?”

“Nope. I haven’t got around to asking him yet, and he’s called Remus, not the werewolf.” Potter pushed the bottle of liquid towards his father. “Would you like this?”

“This one’s all yours, Harry.” Severus turned to Pettigrew. “You should have thought twice before touching Luna, Pettigrew.”

Wormtail laughed maniacally. “But she was so warm and inviting; one of the best fucks I’ve ever had.” While Wormtail couldn’t hurt Potter physically, it was obvious to Harry that his weapons of choice were mental barbs. It was also equally obvious to Harry that Wormtail was probably more than a little insane.

Harry could see that Potter was struggling to hold his temper as he approached his prisoner. “Open up Wormtail. I won’t ask again.”

Wormtail refused so Potter nodded to Herms who cast the bone-breaking spell on his left leg. True to his word, Potter said nothing as Herms cast the spell again and again until eventually both of Wormtail’s legs were broken in a myriad of places. Harry could see what he thought was bone sticking through Wormtail’s left trouser leg.

After Herms had finished with her handiwork, Potter stepped over to Wormtail and ground his foot into Wormtail’s left leg, making him scream. “That’s the way.” The boy then emptied the pipette into Wormtail’s open mouth.

Harry had thought that Pettigrew’s screams during the cruciatus curse his Dad had cast on him had been bad enough, but they paled in comparison to the sounds that were coming from Wormtail’s mouth.

Tears were streaming down Wormtail's face as he sought to escape from the pain.

"Not exactly pumpkin juice is it?" Potter smiled nastily. "Tell me, Wormtail, how does it taste?"

Wormtail couldn't speak for screaming.

Potter looked totally unsympathetic. "Tell me. Where's Voldemort holding Remus?"

Wormtail continued to scream.

Severus coughed lightly. "Perhaps you had better give him the antidote before he's got no vocal cords left to tell you with."

Potter picked up a second bottle and dripped the liquid from it into Wormtail's mouth. Wormtail's screams subsided as the liquid dripped its way down his throat.

"Where is he, Wormtail?" Potter calmly asked.

Unable to face any more torture, Wormtail hoarsely told him.

"There, that wasn't so bad now, was it?" Potter turned away from Wormtail.

Harry had a horrible feeling that despite telling Potter where Remus was being held, Potter hadn't finished with the man yet. He was right.

Potter turned to Wormtail once more. "You know why I had to do this don't you?"

Wormtail nodded. "To get Remus back."

"That's just part of it." Potter grinned in an unpleasant way.

"What do you mean?" Wormtail croaked.

“Come now, Wormtail. You don’t think this is just about Remus do you?” Potter leant back against the table.

“What else then?” Wormtail snapped, as if bored.

“You couldn’t wait to tell me at the start of our conversation about every bit of torment you inflicted upon my wife.” The boy reached for the knife again but didn’t move away from the table.

“What of it?” Wormtail blustered.

Potter casually cleaned under his fingernails with the tip of the knife as he spoke. “Haven’t you been taking note of what we’ve been doing so far?”

Wormtail paled as he realized that Potter was working his way through the same things he’d taunted the boy that he’d done to his wife. “But...”

“Yes, Wormtail, we’ve covered everything except for the final indignity you put her through.” Potter got up and advanced on Wormtail. “Since you’ve already told me she was one of the best fucks you’ve ever had, how about I return the favor?”

Wormtail went whiter than he already was and croaked, “Please, no.”

“Did my wife beg you for mercy?” Potter took a step closer. “Well, did she?”

Wormtail began to cry and nodded.

“And did you show her any?” Wormtail didn’t answer.

“Did Voldemort show her any?” This time Wormtail shook his head.

“Obviously I’m not going to rape you.” Potter told the chained man whose face took on a look of relief. “I wouldn’t defile myself. No, Wormtail, I’ve got a better idea.”

Potter then knelt down and whispered softly into Wormtail's ear, making Harry strain to hear what he was saying. "I'm just going to remove a certain little something instead."

At the boy's words, Wormtail's began to scream and beg for all he was worth. As Potter collected his payment, Harry collapsed to his knees and vomited up his lunch.

Remus heard a noise and looked round. He then cast a privacy bubble to encase the three men and Harry. "I told you we shouldn't have let him stay."

Harry wiped his mouth and looked up as the sound of a door opening reached his ears.

A tall bald-headed dark-skinned man had come into the room with a woman he recognized as Nym, George's sister. "Well, did you get the information?"

Potter told Nym what he had found out. "Don't worry, we'll get him back."

Nym looked teary eyed but determined. "I'm going to get him."

Potter shook his head. "Remus would kill me if I let anything happen to you."

Nym ignored Potter and stomped out of the room.

Herms looked at Potter. "She's going to go you know."

Potter smiled a little ruefully. "I know, but at least I can tell Remus that I tried to stop his girlfriend."

Wormtail, who by now was bleeding profusely and barely conscious, groaned, and Potter turned to the man who had come in with Nym. "Shack, can you get him out of here? Make sure he doesn't bleed out. I need him alive."

Shack nodded and released Wormtail from his chains, and then floated him out of the room; Severus nodded to Potter and Herms before he left himself and closed the door behind him. The moment they'd gone, Potter's face changed and he sank into a chair.

Harry was surprised at the anguish that Potter was obviously feeling. He hadn't expected him to be so upset especially after the viciousness of what he had just done.

Both of them swung around as Herms burst into tears, prompting Potter to get up and comfort her. "I'm sorry, Herms but I had to get that bastard to tell me where Remus was. I've lost too many people already."

"Will you please stop calling me Herms? You know I hate it." Herms scolded Potter, trying to hide her real distress at the act she had participated in.

Potter shuddered. "Even knowing what that bastard did to Luna and that he deserved everything I did to him, I still feel so dirty."

Herms shook her head. "Don't. You're right. He did deserve it. He was taunting me about what he was going to do me when we brought him in."

Potter looked furious. "If it wasn't for the fact that I need him alive to make sure he's telling the truth about Remus, I'd kill him with my bare hands now."

"What's going to happen after we get Remus back?" Herms asked quietly.

"We're going to give him to the Dementor we've got imprisoned in the basement." Potter shuddered at the thought of the thing they had trapped there.

Suddenly Harry felt a hand on his shoulder. Spinning round he found Severus standing behind him. "Professor Snape, what are you doing here?"

"We're in your mind, Harry. I had to use legilimency on you as we couldn't bring you around." Severus explained.

"I think I'm in one of my visions." Harry waved his arm to encompass the room.

Severus nodded. "You're probably right but Harry, we need to go. Remus is probably frantic by now; he was getting worked up when we couldn't get you to come to."

"How do I get out?" Harry had no idea of how he had gotten there in the first place, let alone how to escape.

"Close your eyes and picture the cavern you were standing in. Then relax." Severus hoped his idea would work.

It did. Harry heard his Dad gasp as Harry opened his eyes. "I'm okay Dad."

Remus held Harry even more tightly. "I was scared out of my mind." Remus looked behind him at Wormtail. "I'm taking Harry home. I'll be back to finish this later."

Severus put a hand on Remus' arm to stop him. "We can all go. Pettigrew's not going anywhere, is he?"

Remus shook his head. "There's something in the chemical make-up of this cavern that makes it impossible to apparate or port-key. The only way in or out is through that passageway which I'm going to seal when we leave."

Remus dropped the privacy bubble and turned to Pettigrew. "We're going. You'd better hope we decide to come back. Think on what we've asked, and we might go easier on you next time. If not, there's always your mother."

Pettigrew didn't bother responding and just collapsed into a heap as he watched the four of them leave the cave.

Felidae stopped before anyone apparated out. "We need to talk somewhere privately. I think that we'd better go back to my home. I can take you one by one."

Severus and Remus both nodded.

Harry's mouth fell open for the second time that day as he opened his eyes and looked around. "This is where you live?"

Felidae nodded. "I enjoy a little comfort."

Harry couldn't believe the opulence of the surroundings. The room they had apparated into was huge and surrounded on three sides by windows. The vista from the windows would have been of lush green countryside if there had been any daylight left to view it by. However, with night having fallen, it was now just an inky blackness. Just outside the windows a patio ran around the entire length of the house. Harry could see numerous small fountains and pools dotting the garden that lay beyond it, all illuminated by subtle lighting. Inside the room Felidae had decorated it with black oversized leather seats and sofas which were artfully arranged around highly polished glass coffee and side tables. A massive fireplace dominated the only windowless wall. The overall effect was of both comfort and luxury.

A small elf appeared and bowed low. "Master is home. French lives to serve."

Felidae smiled. "You can drop the act. They're friends."

The elf stood up straight. "Yes, sir. Does everyone want something to drink?"

Severus struggled to contain his surprise at the elf's grasp of language.

Felidae grinned at him. "I've had French since he was a baby. I hate subservient, groveling elves and tried to teach him to be different. He just puts on an act if I'm ever entertaining as I don't generally want people knowing how different he is."

Harry liked the way the elf talked. "I think it's cool."

"Thanks, Harry." Felidae looked totally relaxed now, a far cry from the business-like man he had been in the cavern.

Everyone picked their choice of drinks and French disappeared to get them.

Harry turned to his Dad. "Are you really a Death Eater, or were you just doing that to frighten Peter?"

Remus pulled up his sleeve. "Take a good look. It's real, I'm afraid."

Harry looked carefully at his Dad's arm and frowned. "But I thought that You-Know-Who didn't mark dark creatures."

Felidae laughed. "He doesn't. Remus here pulled a fast one on him. He somehow managed to hide that he was a registered werewolf for the first three months after he joined."

Severus could have kicked himself. He should have picked that up when he spoke to Remus on Christmas Eve; then again he had had more important things on his mind. "How did you do that?"

"Because the person who thought it would be a good idea to have a spy for the light in the Dark Lord's camp made my registration papers disappear long enough for me to get me in there." Remus sounded bitter. "It worked to a certain extent but after the Dark Lord discovered what I was, my access to any useful information dried up."

"Why didn't You-Know-Who kill you when he found out?" Harry asked.

"Because he preferred to make an example of me, and besides, he found a better use for me than death." Remus didn't elaborate any further and Harry didn't really want to find out what Voldemort had done to his Dad.

Harry then asked quietly. "Why didn't you just leave?"

“Because I was ordered me to stay and to do whatever I had to do to, despite my no longer being a useful spy.” Remus sounded angry. “And you don’t just leave the Dark Lord, if you want to live.”

Harry drew back a little.

“Harry, I’m not angry with you. I was only seventeen and just out of school when I joined the Dark Lord.” Remus softened his voice. “I didn’t break free until Jamie somehow vanquished him.”

“So You-Know-Who still thinks you are his servant?” Harry watched as Remus nodded.

Harry was relieved to hear that his Dad hadn’t really been a true Death Eater, and turned his attention to the other two in the room. “Are you two really Death Eaters as well?”

Severus couldn’t see any reason to hide what he had nearly become. “I almost was. I fell into the wrong crowd at school, and joining the Dark Lord was simply the next step.”

Harry’s brow puckered as he thought about his next question. “How do you join up?”

“Well, you don’t just walk up and knock on his door.” Felidae drawled mockingly.

Still angry from his remembrances of Dumbledore, Remus lashed out at his friend. “Piss off Dae. Harry has asked a legitimate question. It’s not as if he was around when the Dark Lord came to power.”

Felidae had the good grace to look abashed and apologized to Harry.

Severus looked down his nose at Felidae. “If I may?”

Felidae just shrugged his shoulders, so Severus continued. “I had a sponsor contact me asking if I wanted to meet with someone who was going to lead the wizarding world to greatness. I immediately knew who he was talking about and jumped at the opportunity. To be admitted I had to complete two tasks for the Dark Lord. The first one

was simple. I merely had to follow Dumbledore around for a week and report on his movements, which I did.”

“What was the second?” Harry asked.

“I had to go to a house with another novice and kill whomever I found there.” Severus looked directly at Harry as he spoke.

Harry’s voice dropped to a whisper. “Did you do it?”

Severus shook his head. “I couldn’t. Unfortunately I was unable to do anything to save one of the occupants of the house who was killed by the other novice, but I rescued the other two people who lived there.”

“Did you return to You-Know-Who?” Harry wanted to know.

Severus again shook his head. “No, I only have a half finished dark mark.” Severus unrolled his sleeve and showed Harry. “I had to complete the second task and report back to him to become fully initiated.”

Several platters of warm food appeared on the tables where the four of them were sitting, and French appeared with a tray full of drinks. “I’ve used the replenishing glasses, Sir.”

“Thanks, French. That’ll be all for tonight.” Felidae smiled appreciatively at his elf.

Silence fell for a short time while the four of them tucked into the food. Eventually, though, everyone had had enough to eat.

Felidae put down his glass and looked at Harry. “I suppose you want to know about me now, don’t you?”

Harry nodded and Felidae rolled up his sleeve to reveal his own dark mark. “It’s real.”

Harry thought about his friend. “Does Hermione know you’re a Death Eater?”

"I'm no longer a Death Eater, and, no, she doesn't know what I was." Felidae informed Harry. "It's not really any of her business anyway."

"But..." Harry's words were cut off as Felidae interrupted.

"I'm not going to marry Hermione, Harry. We actually severed our marriage contract during our trip to the Ministry." Felidae told him.

Harry looked worried. "But what about Nott?"

"My contact at the Ministry has arranged for the records to be permanently sealed until Hermione's eighteenth birthday, when we'll announce that we have called our marriage off." Felidae explained. "So you are now free to see Hermione without recourse to me."

Harry was staggered. "Why didn't you do this before?"

Felidae stood up and walked over to the window, "Because until Hermione explained how miserable she was, I didn't see any point. After that I made the necessary arrangements."

Harry knew that he would be speaking to Hermione on his return to school.

Felidae turned back to face Harry. "So, do you have any more questions about joining the Dark Lord for me?"

Harry nodded. "Did you join voluntarily as Professor Snape did?"

"Absolutely. I totally believed in the Dark Lord's ideals at first. I hated the idea of muggleborns polluting the pureblood bloodlines." Felidae sat down. "But everything changed as the Dark Lord became twisted with power. His goals were no longer my own. I didn't want to kill muggles. I just wanted to make sure that there was no way of their ever discovering our world. Banning muggleborns from Hogwarts would have ensured this."

"Do you still feel the same way?" Harry knew that Lily wouldn't have been allowed to attend Hogwarts if people like Felidae and Voldemort had had their way.

“No.” Felidae sounded vehement. “Once you leave the security blanket that is Hogwarts and you are freed from the prejudices that form there, you finally begin to form your own opinions. I eventually realized that I’d made a big mistake.”

“I’ve never heard of a Felidae Venant attending Hogwarts.” Severus observed. “Perhaps you’d care to tell me who you really are.”

Felidae could have kicked himself. “I didn’t actually say I’d attended Hogwarts; I just used it as an example that Harry could relate to.”

Severus was certain Felidae was lying but let the matter rest. “My mistake.”

Harry listened to the conversation with interest. Looking at Felidae, he had one more question for him. “Did you have to kill anyone to get in?”

“What do you think?” Felidae turned the question back on Harry.

Harry assumed that meant yes, and feeling uncomfortable under the weight of Felidae’s pointed stare, he turned to his Dad. “Dad, do you, err...?”

“Kill anyone Harry?” Remus finished the question for his son. “I’m afraid that’s the only way in.”

Harry felt sick. “But how could you?”

Felidae could see Remus struggling to answer the question, and stepped in to respond to Harry. “Harry, until you’re in the same situation as your Dad, you shouldn’t judge him. He had to do some pretty awful things to survive.”

Harry paled. “Sorry, Dad.”

“It’s okay, Harry.” Remus took a deep breath.

Harry had another question. “Dad, did you have a sponsor?”

Remus nodded. "You're looking at him."

Felidae bowed slightly in response. "I was told by the Dark Lord to find some new recruits and I stupidly picked your Dad."

Remus responded in return by raising his middle finger at Felidae, making Harry giggle.

"But joking aside, I thought he would make a great Death Eater. I'd heard him a few times mouthing off about muggles and muggleborns. Unfortunately I lived to regret my decision." Felidae watched as Harry half-opened his mouth and then shut it again. "I know what you're going to ask. Did the Dark Lord punish me?" Harry nodded and in answer, Felidae shucked off his shirt and turned around.

Harry gasped at the marks that ran across Felidae's back. "Why didn't you get it healed?"

"Because the Dark Lord locked me in a cell for a week without any medical intervention. My back became infected and beyond being able to be returned to its original state." Felidae pulled his shirt back on.

Harry looked at his Dad, not entirely sure that he wanted to know what he'd done or gone through.

"I may as well tell you, as I don't want this festering between us." Remus knew he couldn't cope with his son not speaking to him again.

"Remus, I don't think it's a good idea." Felidae cautioned him.

Remus ignored him. "In addition to leaving me with a back like Dae's..."

Harry interrupted his Dad. "But there's nothing wrong with your back."

"I wear a glamour, Harry." Remus watched as Harry mentally kicked himself. "As I was saying, as well as scarring my back, the Dark Lord branded me with a W on the inside of my wrist."

Harry had seen animals branded on television and was appalled. "How could anyone do that to another human being?"

"That was child's play for the Dark Lord." Remus informed his son. "After finding out about what I was and how I'd tricked him, the Dark Lord found a special use for me."

Dae stepped in. "Don't Remus."

Harry put his hand on his Dad's arm. "You don't have to tell me."

Remus shook his head. "I don't want you somehow finding out about what I did from someone else." Remus took a large swallow of his scotch before continuing. "The cavern you've just been in had more than one use. Not only did we use it for interrogating and keeping prisoners, but due to its size the Dark Lord also used it as a sporting arena."

Harry had a horrible feeling that he knew where Remus was going with his explanation.

Remus carried on. "Usually it was used as an arena on the night of the full moon. If you were a Death Eater who'd betrayed him or a deserter, you were taken to the cavern and chained up. The other Death Eaters were then brought in and sat behind metal cages to watch the action."

Harry swallowed hard. "You were the entertainment weren't you?"

Remus nodded. "The Death Eaters took bets on who would last the longest against me. But that's not the worst."

Harry wondered how much worse it could get.

Remus' voice was a little shaky as he continued speaking. "Muggles were also brought into the arena for fun. The men and children were left to be slaughtered but the women provided a different kind of entertainment."

Dae stood up. "That's enough, Remus. You went through it once without reliving it again and again for your son."

Harry tried not to cry as he got up and hugged his Dad. "How could he do it you?"

Remus almost collapsed in relief as he realized that Harry wasn't blaming him. "Because to the Dark Lord, muggles were nothing more than animals, and as a werewolf I was barely much more palatable than them."

Finally Harry asked the question that frightened him most. "You said that he still thinks that you're his servant. Will you have to go back if he returns?"

Remus nodded. "If I didn't, he'd eventually track me down and kill me."

"But you're nothing to him." Harry cried out, as his worst fears were confirmed.

Remus shook his head. "It doesn't matter. Despite the fact that I'm a werewolf, I'm still also a Death Eater and it is an unwritten law that you don't leave his service unless you're dead. I've told you what fate awaits you if do and I now have a family to think of."

Harry struggled to hold back the tears that threatened once more, and, thinking of Hermione, turned to Severus. "What about you? Will you have to go back?"

Severus shook his head. "He knows that I don't and never will serve him. I hadn't fully taken the dark mark."

"Will he kill you for it?" Harry asked.

Severus nodded. "He will and he'll probably force someone like your Dad to do it."

Harry thought that seeing Wormtail being tortured was the low point of his evening and that things couldn't get any worse. Now he

realized how wrong he had been as he discovered that two people that he cared for could end up dead, or worse, if Voldemort was allowed to return.

Severus looked at Felidae. "I take it you'll be joining Remus if the Dark Lord returns?"

Felidae snorted. "I highly doubt it as he thinks I'm dead."

Severus raised an eyebrow. "But why would he think that?"

"Because he sent out his most loyal Lieutenant to do it, and he never usually fails to make a kill." Felidae told him.

Severus shot to his feet, startling Harry. "You know who they are?"

Felidae nodded. "A few of them."

"I want to know." Severus demanded.

"I can't tell you. I'd be dead before their names left my mouth." Felidae knew that Severus probably intended to gain revenge for what had been done to his wife. "If you're going to do what I think you're going to do, then you'll need to know as many dark spells as possible, because believe me, they won't hesitate to use such spells against you. And Merlin help you if he sends Him after you."

Severus wondered who Him was. "It looks as though I'd best brush up on my spells then, doesn't it?"

Harry ignored Severus' comment and turned to Felidae again. "So he sent his worst Death Eater after you. Why aren't you dead?"

"Because he was overconfident in his abilities. He didn't bother to check that I was actually dead. I would have died if I hadn't been found by someone who was able to help me." Felidae shuddered at what might have been.

Felidae decided to turn the spotlight onto Harry. "So, Harry, what brought about your episode in the cavern?"

Harry shook his head. "I don't know. One minute I was watching Dad taunt Pettigrew, and the next I was in a room watching someone who looked a lot like me torturing Pettigrew."

"You saw yourself torturing Pettigrew?" Remus asked.

Harry nodded. "He looked older than me though, and called Pettigrew 'Wormtail'. Also this Pettigrew had a silver hand."

"Do you think you're seeing the future?" Felidae asked.

"I don't think so, or at least I hope not." Harry responded. "You-Know-Who had captured Dad and this other Harry was trying to find out where he was."

"Did Wormtail tell him?" Remus enquired.

Harry nodded again. "But only after this other Harry, who Wormtail called 'Potter', cut out his eye and poured some sort of liquid which I think dissolved his vocal cords down Wormtail's throat."

"Did he do anything else to him?" Severus asked, remembering Harry's visions of previous.

"He removed a certain part of his anatomy." Harry felt too embarrassed to tell them outright.

The three men listening all cringed. Felidae returned to his earlier question. "Are you sure it's not the future?"

Harry thought for a moment. "If it was then I'm supposed to have been married to Luna; I'm calling Professor Snape 'father', Dad is 'Remus' and Pettigrew has acquired a silver hand."

Remus could tell Harry was hiding something else. "Out with it Harry."

Harry looked embarrassed. "From what I could gather, that Remus was dating Nym."

“Nym Weasley?” Remus looked horrified. “But she’s just a kid.”

Felidae burst out laughing. “That’ll teach you for ribbing me over Hermione.”

Harry grinned at the lighthearted interplay. “Sorry Dad, but that’s what it sounded like to me.”

Harry suddenly thought of something. “There was this tall black guy who that Harry called Shack.”

Felidae looked at Remus. “Kingsley?”

Remus shrugged. “I can’t think of anyone else who would fit the description.”

“Have you had any other visions like this?” Felidae asked.

Harry nodded and explained about what had happened with Sirius and Severus.

Remus turned to Severus. “So you were teaching my son Occlumency and Legilimency?”

Severus nodded. “I was trying to help him with his nightmares.” Severus couldn’t mention Dumbledore; he knew that he’d end up in too much pain if he did.

Remus turned on Harry. “And you didn’t think about telling me?”

Harry looked at the floor. “I didn’t want to worry you.”

“Next time you get into something like this, I want to know.” Remus demanded.

Harry still didn’t meet Remus’ eyes, and Remus guessed there was something else that Harry hadn’t told him. “What else are you messing about with that I don’t know about?”

“I’m doing my animagus training.” Harry admitted.

Severus now also turned on the boy. "I thought I told you not to attempt that alone."

Remus was really pissed at Severus now. "You've been teaching him that as well?"

Severus shook his head. "I was supposed to but had to back out. I warned him and my daughter not to continue."

Harry realized that Hermione was probably going to get into trouble as well as Severus turned on him again. "Has Hermione been doing this training as well?"

Harry nodded. "But we've had adult supervision. Maman has been teaching us."

"How?" Severus snapped.

"She and Sirius gave me some mirrors for communicating." Harry squirmed under Severus' gaze.

"Do you have any idea how dangerous that is?" Severus barked.

"But we were only doing reading; nothing more." Harry protested.

Remus was angry at what Harry had hidden from him. "Harry, I can't allow this to go unpunished. You lied to me about how you knew about legilimency. Even though you weren't speaking to me, I still expected you to be truthful when I asked you something. You will report to Mr. Filch every Friday for a month on your return to school."

"But Dad..." Harry started to complain.

"Make that every Friday for six weeks." Remus snapped.

Harry shut up. He barely had enough time as it was without having to serve a detention with Filch.

Remus frowned. "Am I clear?"

“Yes, Sir.” Harry was mortified at being reprimanded in front of everyone.

Remus turned to Felidae and Severus. “I think it’s time Harry went home.”

Severus pulled Remus to one side. “I should have told you about the legilimency. I’m sorry.”

Remus sighed. “I can hardly put you in detention, can I?”

Severus laughed. “You could try.”

Harry couldn’t hear what was being said but from the way his Dad and Severus were laughing, it didn’t appear as if Severus had gotten into trouble with his Dad over helping him.

Remus shook hands with Severus and turned to Harry. “Let’s go.”

As they stepped towards the fireplace, it suddenly flared up and a tall blonde man stepped through. “Dae, Mum and Dad are...” Leo left his sentence unfinished as he realized that his brother wasn’t alone. “Sorry, I didn’t realize you had guests.”

“Remus is just taking Harry home.”

The blonde man nodded to Remus, and then looked irately at Felidae. “You’re late.”

“Something’s cropped up.” Felidae didn’t fill his brother in what it was.

Remus shepherded Harry towards the fireplace. “I’ll be back as soon as I’ve taken Harry back to his mother.”

Next chapter: We learn a little bit more about the Lieutenants amongst other things - I hope to update by Friday, if not earlier. Happy Labor Day everyone!

Chapter 34: Death Eaters Revealed

Harry heaved a sigh of relief as he stayed upright on arriving home. Remus pulled out his wand and cleaned up the ash from the carpet. "Dad, do you have to go back to Felidae's yet?"

"You want to talk about this evening?" Remus asked.

Harry nodded. "If we can. We can use my bedroom. There's nowhere to sit in the study now." Remus' old study had been emptied so that Nia could redecorate and use it as a home office for her business.

Remus followed Harry upstairs and into his room, casting a privacy spell so that they wouldn't disturb anyone. "I suppose this about my being a Death Eater, isn't it?"

Harry nodded and asked the question that had been playing on his mind ever since his Dad had confirmed the veracity of his claim. He had noticed that his Dad had kept one name out of the conversation. "Who forced you to join You-Know-Who?"

Remus didn't really want to tell Harry but knew he had to. "Dumbledore. He told me he was getting an army together to fight the Dark Lord and asked if I would like to be a part of it. I stupidly agreed and ended up being bound not only to the Dark Lord, but to Dumbledore as well."

"So he's the reason you couldn't leave?" Harry was disgusted that his headmaster would make someone who was still more or less a child join the Dark Lord.

Remus nodded. "The oath I swore to Dumbledore bound me to obey him. If I didn't I could have ended up in immense pain or, worse, dead."

"But..." Harry didn't quite know how to phrase his question. "why didn't...?"

Remus saved him the bother of finishing his question. "You want to know why I didn't sacrifice myself when I found out what I had to do, don't you?"

Harry took a deep breath and nodded.

"If I had, then no-one would have escaped from the Dark Lord's prison. I knew that if I killed myself, he would have found someone else to take my place; someone who wouldn't have been as sympathetic to the muggle prisoners." Remus explained.

Harry gasped. "You were helping muggle prisoners to escape?"

"Felidae and I both were." Remus smiled grimly.

"How did you do it?" Harry couldn't see how anyone could have hoodwinked the Dark Lord, particularly after what he had been told that evening.

Remus sat down on Harry's bed. "The Dark Lord's men weren't always the brightest as he tended to recruit quantity not quality. None of them bothered to ward the muggle prison cells against apparition and portkey transportation, as no-one thought the muggle prisoners could get out that way. Felidae used to transform and drop pieces of food into the prison cell when the guards were distracted."

Harry interrupted. "So Felidae's an animagus as well? I thought that there were only a few wizards capable of it."

Remus grinned. "That's what the Ministry wants you to believe. There are probably hundreds of unregistered animagi running around. I know more than ten."

Harry was agog. Even though he had wanted to do his animagus training, he still hadn't been sure that he would be one of the few who could achieve it. Now he knew that animagi numbers were more prolific than he first thought, he felt more encouraged in his pursuit. "Wow. What's Felidae's form?"

“That’s not for me to disclose.” Remus told his son. Remus hid his smirk at the thought of Felidae’s form; Felidae would kill him if he ever revealed it to anyone.

“Do you want to know more about how we did it?” At Harry’s affirmation, Remus continued. “Felidae would slip into the cell disillusioned, transform and drop the food pieces. The starving prisoners would, of course, try to grab them, and they’d disappear. Felidae would then unlock the door and walk out. No-one worked out how we were doing it at first. My job was to distract the guards whilst Felidae did his bit. The guards were usually executed for letting the prisoners escape. Some were executed as sympathizers; other just for being sloppy.”

Harry grimaced. “So you were effectively killing Death Eaters?”

Remus nodded. “Harry, it was dog eat dog. The Death Eaters who were executed for failing to do their job properly wouldn’t have hesitated to kill any of the muggles we helped to escape. I have no regrets about their fates whatsoever.”

Harry thought this a little harsh but as Remus had pointed out earlier, Harry didn’t know what it was like back then. “You said that no-one worked it out at first. Someone eventually did then?”

Remus nodded. “The Dark Lord. It didn’t take him too long to figure out that somehow someone was getting portkeys into the prison cells and he immediately erected wards. I’m lucky he didn’t discover it was me.”

Harry noticed Remus hadn’t included Felidae. “What about Felidae?”

Remus pulled a face. “The Dark Lord discovered him in the cell. I hadn’t gotten down there yet when a general alarm was sounded. Felidae admitted to everything, except for my help, and was thrown into a prison cell to await the night of the full moon.”

“How did you save him?” Harry knew that Remus had have to done it, otherwise Felidae wouldn’t have been with them now.

“One of his guards was a little lax on duty and I was able to dispose of him.” Harry winced at his Dad’s casual attitude towards killing the Death Eaters. “I slipped into Felidae’s cell, and bit him to mark him as part of my pack.” Remus omitted the appalling state that Felidae had been in when he’d reached his cell.

“Why couldn’t you just get him out?” Harry asked. ‘And why didn’t anyone notice his guard was dead?’

“There were too many guards on the other levels. I was lucky to have been placed in a position to get access to his cell.” Remus had been grateful for his newly elevated status that day. “I didn’t kill the guard Harry; that would have been too noticeable. I just used the imperious curse to make him take a walk instead. A little bit of obliviation when he returned and no-one was any the wiser.”

“What happened next?” Harry was so intrigued by the story that he failed to ask Remus what position had allowed him to gain access to the cell.

“Felidae was released into the arena along with the guards who had failed in their jobs. I don’t really retain too many memories of what happened. If I’m not taking Wolfsbane, the memories are usually quite hazy. Felidae told me that I dispatched one of the guards before turning on him. I didn’t bite him but I did do him some damage.” Remus watched Harry blanch.

“Why did you hurt him if you marked him?” Harry hadn’t heard about marking people before.

“He’s male and I did it to show him who is the alpha in the pack.” Remus hadn’t covered pack dynamics and mating with his children as he considered them too young.

Harry was puzzled. “But wouldn’t Felidae just have been subservient to you? Did you really need to attack him?”

“Before the evening began I laid down a scent in the entrance to the cavern I knew would attract me once I’d transformed. I caught a whiff of this when I first identified Felidae as part of my pack. After

subduing him I was apparently so desperate to get out to the entrance that I ripped out the bars that were there, and managed to get through. I killed both guards who were watching from there, and Felidae was able to clamber out behind me through the hole I'd just made. Of course I tried to attack him, but he apparated away. It took the Dark Lord himself to bring me down and knock me unconscious." Remus was glad that the Dark Lord had been there; if he hadn't Remus would probably have ended up dead.

Harry's eyes were like saucers. "Did he punish you?"

"Surprisingly no. He believed I was going after the guards and that Felidae just took advantage of the moment. After all, he'd already seen me attack Felidae once. He actually praised me on the good sport that had been had." Remus looked a little sickened. "After that he deliberately weakened the bars in some spots. It added to the thrill of the night for most of the Death Eaters."

"Did you ever get through the bars again?" Harry asked.

Remus nodded. "Even though I never scented any of the areas again, if I found a weakened spot, then yes. Luckily this only lasted for a short time as the Dark Lord was dispatched by your brother a few months later."

As Harry contemplated what his Dad had just told him, he watched Remus' face take on a stern look. "Harry, Felidae, Severus and I have all been extremely open with you tonight about what happened in our personal lives. I don't want you to discuss this with anyone, not your brothers or sisters, your mother and especially not Hermione. It is up to Severus if he wants to tell her."

"Can I talk to you or Professor Snape about it?" Harry knew that he might have more questions.

"Of course, you may but you might find Severus doesn't know everything. Remember he didn't actually fully join the Death Eaters." Remus stood up and stretched. "I've got to get going."

Harry hugged his Dad, reveling in the feeling that he'd missed when he'd been unable to talk to Remus. "I love you Dad."

"I love you too Harry." Remus ruffled Harry's hair making him frown.

Remus headed towards the door. "Oh, and Harry?"

"Yes Dad?" Harry stopped in mid-action.

"Don't think that I'm going to go easy on you about the detention. It still stands." Remus grinned and headed out of the door.

Harry pulled a face. He'd been hoping to get out of it.

Back at Felidae's House

Felidae looked at Leo. "Leo, can I have a private word?"

Leo nodded and followed his brother. Severus wasn't surprised to see the two men disappear through the apparently solid wall where the fireplace was situated. He too, had a similar entrance to his private potion stores at Snape Manor.

"What is it?" Leo yawned. "Mum's waiting for us to celebrate New Year."

"She's going to have to wait a little longer then." Felidae looked serious as he spoke. "Leo, we're holding Pettigrew."

Leo immediately became alert. "Why didn't you let me know?"

"We, err, had a few questions for him." Felidae didn't look quite so confident now that his brother was scowling at him.

"As your immediate superior, you're supposed to inform me before you start to interrogate a prisoner with Veritaserum." Leo snapped.

Felidae didn't meet Leo's eyes as he spoke. "We didn't use any."

“For crying out loud, Felidae. You know the rules.” Leo was shouting by now. “How am I going to explain this, and where the hell are you keeping him?”

Felidae snapped back. “Ordinarily yes, I know the rules, but circumstances are a little different here.”

Leo sighed and sat down. “Tell me.”

“Pettigrew tried to kidnap Remus’ youngest kid; he held a knife to her throat. We ambushed him, and took him to a secure location.” Felidae started to explain.

“Who’re we?” Leo finally asked.

“Myself, Remus and Severus.” Felidae explained.

“And you’re telling me that Severus didn’t have any Veritaserum available?” Leo knew that Severus usually kept some in his stores.

“He didn’t have any; Dumbledore’s been pressing him to make new derivatives and he’d used up all his stock.” Felidae explained. “Besides, Remus was pissed at Pettigrew and wanted to take it out on his ass for attacking his daughter.”

Leo didn’t say anything for a moment. “I think you’d better take me to him.”

“Remus should be back shortly. We can all go then.” Felidae turned towards the door. “You’ll need one of us to apparate you in as we’ve got the place he’s being held under the Fidelius charm.”

“Just make it quick.” Leo ordered.

The two men returned to the room just as Remus flooed back in. “Did I miss anything?”

Leo nodded. “I want you and Felidae to take me to where you’re holding Pettigrew.”

Remus nodded. "Of course. I'll take Severus."

Severus scowled. "I can apparate myself."

Remus grinned. "Tell me where you're going then."

Severus thought about it and realized he couldn't remember. "Don't tell me, it's hidden."

Remus held out his arm for Severus, which he took begrudgingly.

A few seconds later all four men were standing in the passageway leading into the cavern. Remus removed the spell he'd used to block the entrance into the cavern and stepped inside to find the cavern completely empty. Felidae looked around. "That's impossible; he couldn't have gotten out of here."

"Can he perform wandless magic?" Leo asked.

"I don't know." Remus admitted, as he cast a revealing spell around the cavern just in case Peter had managed to disillusion himself.

The four men suddenly heard a faint pop from the passageway behind them. "Shit." Remus hit the table as he realized Pettigrew had escaped. "I was so distracted by Harry being here, I forgot to erect any anti-animagus wards."

Leo glowered at Remus. "You're telling me that Peter is an unregistered animagus?"

Remus nodded. "He's a rat. I should have realized the moment I stepped into the cave and found him gone. He must have transformed and stayed close to the passageway, just waiting for us to return."

Leo shook his head. "Well, there's nothing we can do now." He turned to look around the massive cavern. "This place is pretty amazing. How did you find it?"

Remus grimaced and told Leo. "Once the Dark Lord fell, I placed the cavern under Fidelius; I couldn't face the Dark Lord being able to use it again. We used it to question any Death Eaters we came across after his demise."

"Don't tell me. 'We' is you and Felidae." Leo remarked sagely.

Felidae nodded. "After I'd recovered from my attack, I contacted Remus and together we tracked down any Death Eaters we could find."

"So Remus was your contact." Leo shook his head. "I should have realized."

"Why would you? You didn't know that Remus was a Death Eater at the time." Felidae pointed out.

Leo yawned. "I suggest we get out of here."

Remus walked towards the exit. "I've got to go back to Nia's. After what I've just put Pettigrew through I don't want him retaliating against my family."

Severus agreed. "You're right. My family is currently in Hogwarts and should be safe. I'll go with you Remus."

Remus and Severus apparated out, leaving Leo and Felidae alone.

Leo looked at Felidae. "Back to your place then?"

Felidae nodded. "I think so. I expect Remus and Severus will come back once they're done."

Sure enough Remus and Severus appeared after little more than an hour.

Felidae looked up from the glass of wine he was drinking. "All sorted?"

Remus sank down into one of the chairs. "Yes, everyone has been moved into Fable House. Grimstock Lovegood has offered to take care of everyone until Pettigrew is apprehended again. Severus erected some warning wards to give Grimstock time to get everyone out should Pettigrew try and return."

French appeared at Remus' elbow. "Firewhiskey, Mr. Remus?"

Remus shook his head. "I'll take a glass of red wine."

Severus indicated that he'd have the same.

Leo turned to Severus. "I can understand how Remus and Dae are involved with Pettigrew. I don't see why you would be as well."

"I don't mean to be rude but why should I tell you anything?" Severus enquired.

"I work for the Ministry with Dae; in fact I'm his boss." Leo grinned at Dae who ignored him.

"Then I presume that you are aware of your brother's background." Severus stated.

"You mean that he was a Death Eater?" Severus nodded, so Leo continued. "Of course I am, and before you ask, no I'm not nor have I ever been a Death Eater."

Severus rolled up his sleeve for the third time that night. "I nearly fell into the same trap your brother did. It was only meeting Virginie that altered the course of my life." He then proceeded to tell Leo about everything that happened. "I was hoping Felidae could help me track down the Dark Lord's Lieutenants, but he's already said that he is unable to."

Leo felt sympathy for what Severus and his wife had gone through. "I'm sorry Severus. Unfortunately Felidae is telling the truth. He took an oath to protect the identity of Voldemort's Lieutenants."

Severus noted that Leo didn't bother calling Voldemort, 'You-Know-Who'. "You refer to the Dark Lord as Voldemort?"

Leo nodded. "I hate everything the man stood for and I don't see why I shouldn't use his name."

Severus was impressed. "I think I like you."

Leo laughed. "Severus, I may be able to help provide you with the identities of some of Voldemort's men."

"You're willing to help me, even though we've only just met?" Severus was surprised.

Leo nodded once more. "I am but I'm going to ask for something in return."

Severus sighed; he knew that Leo's offer had been too good to be true. "What?"

Leo surprised Severus with his demand. "I want you to stop making potions for Dumbledore."

"I can't." Severus told him.

"Why not?" Leo asked.

"I just can't." Severus reiterated.

"Stay still." Severus started as Leo pulled out his wand. "I'm not going to hurt you. I just need to check something." Severus forced himself to relax as Leo slashed his wand through the air uttering "Vinculum Aperio". A ring on Severus' left hand glowed pink.

Leo grimaced. "So he's bound you to him. You're not the first person, and I doubt you'll be the last. I know of a way to help you."

Severus didn't want to get his hopes up. "How?"

"I actually know of two methods but one is extremely dangerous." Leo told Severus.

Severus didn't care. "It doesn't matter; I'll do anything to be free from him." Severus winced as pain shot through his body, as he declared against Dumbledore.

"I suggest you don't say anything that goes against the bond. Let me do all the talking." Leo instructed. "Remus was also bound to Dumbledore."

Remus grimaced. "For too bloody long."

Severus had already guessed this from their conversation about Remus' joining the Death Eaters. "Continue."

Leo looked to Remus who took over. "I was freed by muggle means. I was going to catch what the muggles call an airplane as I was going to another country on holiday. Before I could gain access to the interior of the airport, I had to go through some form of detection device which rendered the earring Dumbledore had bound me with inactive."

"Let's go." Severus stood up.

"It's this method that is the most dangerous. It nearly killed Remus; he actually died and had to be resuscitated by a muggle healer." Leo watched as Severus sank back into his seat. "Unfortunately we only discovered how dangerous this method was when we used it to try and free five people, four of whom had information for us on Dumbledore and it killed three of them."

Severus was shocked. "But why didn't you stop them when you saw it wasn't working?"

Leo looked grim. "Even after the first man died, two others were still determined to try it; they wanted to be free of Dumbledore that badly. We refused to agree to it so they just ran through anyway. They didn't want to wait for us to perform a ritual which could have helped them."

Now the information we could have used has gone. Thankfully the other two made it through the ritual just fine.”

“Why didn’t you just try the ritual first?” Severus was surprised that they hadn’t.

“Because if the detector method had worked, it would have been quicker and less draining on everyone concerned.” Leo ran a hand through his hair. “Unfortunately it didn’t turn out that way.”

“How did you survive then?” Severus asked Remus.

“At first we theorized that perhaps I died because I was a werewolf; Leo wondered if someone who wasn’t would fare better. The three deaths proved, however, that they wouldn’t. I don’t think I’d be here except for my curse.” Remus conjectured.

“The ritual; can I undergo it?” Severus returned his attention to Leo.

“You can but even this has its risks. A few people have died but mostly because they were already in ill health.” Leo informed him. “Do you want to go ahead and try it?”

Severus was silent for a long time as he thought about his family and what his death would do to them. Then he thought about Virginie’s face as Remus had told him about how she had been attacked. “I’ll do it.”

“When?” Leo asked.

“I’ve got all night.” Severus informed the man opposite him.

Felidae looked at Remus. “Do you want to join me at my parents?”

Remus nodded. “I think we can leave these two to get on with this.”

The two men got up and apparated away.

The dawn was just beginning to break as Leo collapsed into a seat. “I’m shattered.”

Severus looked pale and exhausted. "You're not alone." He wanted to get up but couldn't.

French suddenly appeared. "I've drawn baths for you."

Severus was grabbed by the arm and found himself transported into a large, ornate bath. Looking down he could see that his clothes had been vanished by the house elf.

"I'll bring you some pepper-up potion, Mr. Severus." French disappeared.

An hour later Severus and Leo both felt cleaner and more than a little revitalized from the potions that French had supplied them with. Severus looked at the table upon which the symbol of his imprisonment lay. "I'm going to have to wear it again, aren't I?"

Leo knew how much Severus didn't want to put it on. "I'm afraid so. It won't have any effect on you though from now on. It will just make sure Dumbledore doesn't suspect anything."

Severus had another question about the ritual. "You used the ritual to free me from Dumbledore; can't it be used to free Remus and Felidae from their dark marks?"

Leo shook his head. "Unfortunately it only works when someone has been bound by an item; the dark mark is tied into the soul."

Severus felt a little disappointed. He'd also hoped to be rid of the partial dark mark he wore. "Well, it was worth asking."

Leo grinned. "Sorry, but you can't have everything."

Severus returned to the subject he had wanted to discuss the previous night. "I know you must be tired, but I'd really like to discuss Voldemort's Lieutenants. Now that I'm free of Dumbledore, I will be sabotaging his potions, after taking a sample of the good stuff for myself, of course."

Leo knew that his superiors wouldn't be that happy with him but the exchange would be worth it. "If you could also supply us with samples of all the potions you are called upon to make, then I believe we have a deal."

Severus nodded. "That is more than acceptable."

Assured of Severus' good intentions, Leo started to give him the information he required. "We believe that Voldemort had seven Lieutenants."

"But I thought he only had four." Severus interjected. "Remus said that there were four guards who followed him around; a sort of honor guard."

"From the information we have managed to piece together, we think that he had two other higher-ranking Lieutenants who weren't part of this guard." Leo informed Severus. "And one confidante who ranked above all others. However, this confidante didn't surface until a few months before Voldemort's demise."

"Do you know who the four in the honor guard were?" Severus asked.

"We definitely know that Bellatrix Lestrange was one of Voldemort's two higher-ranking Lieutenants. She boasted about it when she was captured. Unfortunately we don't know who the other one was." Leo had found her disgusting. "Of the four honor guards, we're aware of Barty Crouch Junior, but as you know, he's been dead for some time."

"Lucky for him." Severus was pissed that one of them would forever elude his grasp. "Is Malfoy one?"

Leo shook his head. "Not as far as we know, despite rumors to the contrary."

Severus had been expecting a positive answer. "I really thought he was."

“So did we, but we’ve been unable to dig anything up on him.” Leo too, had expected to find something on the slippery aristocrat. “We suspect he may be the confidante, but again, we’ve been unable to confirm or deny this.”

“Who else?” Severus was determined to find out.

“We think there was a woman who was an honor guard, but we don’t know who she is.” Leo was frustrated about the lack of information available to him on her.

“But a woman couldn’t have raped my wife.” Severus pointed out.

“I’m aware of that. I’m just telling you what you wanted to know.” Leo defended himself. “I’m almost one hundred percent sure that the other two in the honor guard were Dominic and Evan Rosier.”

Severus had been friends with the two Rosier cousins, who had both been in Slytherin. He knew Evan had been a Death Eater but not Dominic who had never seemed that interested in the cause. Evan had been killed by an auror, Alastair Moody, during a skirmish in Diagon Alley. Finding out that Dominic had not only been a Death Eater, but also a Lieutenant, had come as a bit of a shock. “You’re that sure?”

Leo smiled sardonically. “Extremely.”

Severus raised an eyebrow. “I have the feeling that I’m missing something.”

Leo touched his ring, causing Severus to jump up and pull his wand. “No wonder you’re so sure.”

“I expected you to react like this.” Unperturbed by Severus’ actions, Leo ignored him. “If I’d been in league with them, I’d hardly have helped you.”

Severus realized how ridiculous he was being, and put away his wand. “I’m sorry but I thought you were dead. It was a surprise to find out that it wasn’t true.”

"It was safer for me to let everyone believe that." Leo explained. "It was either that or be forced to join the Death Eaters like my brother and cousin."

Severus understood peer and family pressure well. "That must have been a difficult decision for you."

Leo laughed bitterly. "Not really. The way my family treated me after I refused to join the Dark Lord made it fairly easy. While my brother and cousin had no problem in turning to him, I found I could not."

Severus pulled a face. "And he obviously rewarded them for their dedication."

Leo agreed. "He did; not that's it doing Evan much good now. Anyway, I renounced my ties to the Rosier family when Peri and Nicolas Flamel adopted me. I am now no more a part of that family than you are."

Severus' eyebrow shot up. "Your parents are the Flamels?"

Leo nodded. "Yes, but it's not something I generally broadcast. At work I go by the name Leo Simultas, in the same way that Felidae uses 'Venant'."

"So Felidae isn't who he seems to be then?" Severus remembered Felidae denying having attended Hogwarts.

"That isn't my story to tell." Leo answered.

Severus returned to the subject of Leo's former family. "I expect your family wasn't pleased when you were placed in Hufflepuff, especially after your brother and cousin made Slytherin."

Leo laughed bitterly. "I was beaten until I couldn't stand. No self-respecting Rosier fails to make Slytherin."

"Who knows that you were once Liam Rosier?" Severus asked.

“Remus, my parents, and Dae amongst others.” Leo told him. “You are one of the select few who know who I really am.”

“Why tell me at all?” Severus was surprised that Leo had revealed his identity to an almost perfect stranger.

“Because if it is Dominic who raped your wife, then I would like to offer my services in eliminating him. I’m supposed to bring him to justice but I’d be happy to make an exception in his case. Obviously with Evan being dead, there’s little I can do for you there.” Leo’s face looked as if it was set in stone. “Also, I still feel the need to pay my brother back for what he did to me.”

Severus wondered what Dominic had done to Leo to warrant his animosity but good manners prevented him from asking. “In that case, you are welcome to assist me in tracking him down.”

“I already know where he lives. He is being constantly monitored but we’re unable to connect him in any way to Voldemort, even though I know differently.” Leo sneered. “Without evidence he can’t be convicted. Until my teams drop their surveillance, I can’t touch him.”

“So it may be some time before I can get my hands on him then?” Severus deduced.

Leo nodded. “I’ll do what I can but you’ll have to wait. I can’t just drop a team from surveillance for no reason.”

“I understand.” Severus then thought about the man they’d had chained up in the cave. “What about Pettigrew?”

“We’re pretty sure he’s not one of them. We checked him thoroughly for a dark mark when we brought him in. He admitted to being the Potter’s secret keeper and that was enough to convict him.” Leo had just joined the department he now ran at the time of Pettigrew’s arrest.

“Did you use Veritaserum on Pettigrew?” Severus returned to the matter of Peter.

“Of course we did when he was taken to court. Under Veritaserum he admitted to being the secret keeper but not of selling the Potters out.” Leo remembered back to the court case. “We knew that there was no way the Potters could have been found unless Pettigrew told him. It was therefore decided that somehow Pettigrew had gotten around the Veritaserum or Voldemort had obliviated him of the knowledge. Either way, he was considered guilty and thrown into Azkaban.”

“Do you think he was guilty?” Severus asked Leo.

“I don’t honestly know. As I can’t see how Voldemort would have found out without Pettigrew telling him, I’d say yes. Then again, Pettigrew was so adamant that he hadn’t given the Potters up, I’d say no.” Leo shrugged. “It beats me.”

Severus felt a little bad about torturing Peter now as it turned out the little man had been telling the truth; but as Leo said he couldn’t be certain. “So if we discount Pettigrew, out of the seven closest Death Eaters to You-Know-Who, you are really only aware of the identities of four, of which two are already dead, and one is imprisoned in Azkaban.”

Leo nodded. “We’re doing what we can.”

“I understand.” Severus leant back against the sofa he was sitting in. “Do you think French could find me something to eat?”

Leo nodded again. “Severus, before he does, I have a confession to make.”

Severus looked warily at Leo. “Go ahead, surprise me.”

Leo touched his ring again and Flitwick stood before Severus. “Surprise!”

Severus didn’t look pleased. “You mean to tell me that you’re actually Flitwick?”

Leo shook his head. “No. The real Flitwick is out and about, travelling the globe. I took over from him some years ago.”

"But I thought you headed a department for The Ministry." Severus was a little confused.

"I do; portraying Flitwick is just part of my current assignment." Leo explained. "I'm sorry I couldn't tell you before but I couldn't trust you not to tell Dumbledore."

"Fair enough." Severus was more than aware of the need for secrecy. "Is there anything else you wish to tell me?"

Leo nodded. "Minerva knows who I am."

Severus relaxed. Despite their quidditch cup rivalry, he and Minerva were actually good friends; the children calling her "Aunt Minnie". "That's good; at least I'll have another ally at school."

"Well, I think that's just about everything." Leo grinned. "I can call French now."

"Thank goodness for that." Severus responded dryly.

The Flamels Home

Remus and Felidae sat in the sitting room, nursing their second drink of the day, despite the early hour. "Do you think we should get back to your place?"

Felidae nodded. "I hope Leo hasn't killed Severus."

Remus laughed. "It'll take more than a ritual to dispense with him."

Felidae smiled but it quickly left his face. "Do you think I should have told Severus about me?"

"Which part?" Remus asked.

"The part about where I was one of the Dark Lord's Lieutenants." Felidae paused. "Perhaps you should come clean too."

"I don't know, Dae. What am I supposed to say?" Remus snapped. "Yes I made Lieutenant, even though I'm a lowly werewolf, and by the way do you want to know who the others were?"

"It's not as if we were Lieutenants when Voldemort ordered the others to rape his wife." Dae pointed out.

"I know that; I just feel so sullied when I think about it." Remus admitted. "It's bad enough admitting to having joined the Dark Lord, even if it was under duress; it's worse to say that I've sworn to save his life if necessary."

"The Dark Lord must have thought something of you in order to promote you, despite the fact that you're considered a dark creature." Dae didn't exactly meet Remus' eyes as he spoke.

Remus glared at him. "Come off it, Dae. We both know why he did it. After several rogue attacks, who better to have as a bodyguard than someone with enhanced abilities; I can not only see better than everyone else, but my hearing and speed are superior as well."

Dae was apologetic. "I'm sorry Remus, but you've got to admit he seemed to like you intellectually."

"Big deal." Remus snarled. "So the Dark Lord recruited mostly idiots and needed someone with half a brain to converse with. It hardly made us best friends. You know very well that despite my 'promotion' I still wasn't privy to any useful information."

"The Dark Lord might have been insane but he certainly wasn't stupid. He wouldn't have made you a Lieutenant without good reason." Dae argued.

"Drop it Dae." Remus growled.

Dae raised his hands. "Okay, okay. I'm sorry. It's just that I hate that I can't tell Severus who I know about."

“At least Leo can. I wonder if he’ll tell him about us?” Remus got up. “I’m going to tell Severus. It’s going to be bad if he finds out from Leo.”

Dae sighed. “I know. I’m getting up fed up of hiding who I am and what I was. I thought it would all be over when I escaped.”

“I sometimes think it’ll never be over.” Remus shuddered. “If it hadn’t been for you, I’d have killed myself after you escaped. With the muggle prisoners unable to get out any more, I just didn’t have any reason to go on.”

“That’s why I made you promise not to.” Dae had refused to attempt any escape unless Remus gave his word.

Remus decided to get away from the depressing topic. “If Leo’s successful with the ritual, I think we should ask Severus to join the Alliance.”

Dae snorted. “You really think Black is going to let him in?”

“I’m not going to give him the option.” Remus knew how Sirius would react. “I can’t see anyone else minding too much except for Lily.”

“I don’t know.” Dae wasn’t entirely convinced. “Lily is probably the first one who would give him a chance.”

Remus disagreed. “I think she’ll be the last one, particularly after what happened in school when he called her a mudblood.”

Remus nor Dae were aware of Severus and Lily’s tentative contact, nor of the fact that the two of them had spent the night together.

“Well I believe Lily is the forgiving kind.” Dae said stubbornly.

“Now why would you think that?” Remus knew there was more to it.

“I told her about my being a Death Eater.” Dae admitted.

Remus was surprised. “Bloody hell, Dae. What made you do that?”

Dae looked sheepish. "I slipped up and she still forgave me despite the fact that I told her I knew about the planned attack on her family."

"I don't believe it. I'm surprised you're still here." Remus smiled despite the seriousness of their conversation as he thought of Lily in a temper. "I'd have thought she'd have chopped you up into little pieces."

Dae grinned back at him. "Let's just say that she threatened me while my stupid brother just sat there."

"Did you also tell her that Voldemort had planned the attack a long time before she went into hiding, along with attacks on several other families?" Remus asked.

Dae shook his head. "It doesn't make any difference. It's all in the past."

"I don't suppose she knows it was you who warned them either?" Remus knew that Dae had probably omitted that part.

"No, she doesn't." Dae looked uncomfortable. "Nothing I've done will make up for what I did when I first became a Death Eater. I'd rather Lily think the worst of me."

Remus shook his head. "I think you should tell her."

"Absolutely not." Dae stubbornly refused. "Have you told her about you?"

"Why would I do that?" Remus asked evasively.

"Because you're still in love with her and the father of her son." Dae pointed out. "Remus, Lily forgave me once she found out that you were willing to be friends with me despite what I'd done."

"I'm not telling her unless I have good reason to. I don't want her pity." Remus marched over to the door. "Let's go see your brother and Severus."

Dae knew that the conversation was over and followed Remus out of the room.

Ten minutes later Remus sat nursing his bloody nose while Severus glared at him. "And you didn't think to tell me this before?"

Remus shook his head. "It's not something I'm exactly proud of."

Severus frowned as he thought of something. "I thought the Lieutenants had the dark marks elsewhere than on their arms."

Dae, who had managed to avoid injury, nodded. "They do. My rights to that were revoked after I betrayed You-Know-Who and the dark mark reverted to my arm. Remus didn't give a damn where his dark mark was."

It suddenly dawned on Severus why. "You were hoping someone would see it and kill you, weren't you?"

Remus nodded. "At first yes, but as time went by, I sort of regretted not having it moved elsewhere."

Leo stood up. "I think we've said and done enough for today. I feel like getting roaring drunk before I have to face my superiors tomorrow morning, and tell them how a certain someone let Pettigrew slip through his fingers."

Felidae groaned. "I'm going to join you. After tomorrow you'll be safely back at Hogwarts. I've got the rest of the term alone to face the music."

Leo wagged a finger. "Serves you right."

Severus got up as well. "As much as I'd like to join you gentlemen, I think I should get back to my family."

Remus inclined his head to Severus. "I'll see you on the train tomorrow. I'm going to join these guys."

Severus left and the three men looked at each other. Felidae waved an arm towards the fireplace. "Oldies first."

Leo backhanded him over the head as he stepped towards the fireplace. "I can still drink you under the table, little brother."

Remus shook his head as he followed the two brothers and disappeared in a green flash.

January 2nd 1994

Harry sat down in an empty carriage. None of his friends or family were travelling back on the Express. Draco was portkeying directly to school from France where he was holidaying with his father. Neville and Seville were both sick and would be late returning to school. His sisters, Dudley and Luna had all shunned the Express in favor of a few more hours at home; Harry thought his sisters' decisions had had more to do with their mother. Hermione was still at Hogwarts, so Harry was pretty much alone. He was therefore surprised when the door opened and Hermione walked in.

"Harry, I was beginning to think you hadn't taken the train." Hermione left the door ajar as it was warm in the carriage, and plonked herself on the seat across from Harry.

"But you were already at school. Why ride the Express?" Harry was surprised Hermione had bothered.

"I wanted to talk to you." Hermione fidgeted a little as she spoke.

"What about?" Harry had a feeling she was going to tell him about her and Felidae.

Hermione proved him right. "It's about my trip to the Ministry; the one I told you I was taking with Felidae."

Harry felt little butterflies in his stomach as she confirmed his assumption. "What about it?"

"We, err, we called off our marriage." Hermione blurted out.

“What about Nott?” Harry asked, despite already knowing.

“The records are sealed until I’m eighteen. Then we’ll just tell everyone that we cancelled the wedding.” Hermione explained.

“So why did you want to tell me?” Harry crossed his fingers.

“Because I didn’t want you to feel bad about what happened anymore.” Hermione looked down at her hands.

Harry was disappointed. He’d expected her to tell him that she would be free to see him now. “So, you can date whomever you want to then?”

Hermione nodded. “Yes, but I don’t see much dating in my future.”

“Why not?” Harry was surprised at Hermione’s answer.

Hermione sounded defensive. “I had a long talk with Felidae on the night of the Yule Ball. He made me see that dating isn’t everything. I’ve therefore decided to focus my attention on my schoolwork and my animagus training.”

Harry decided to bide his time. In some respects he could see Hermione’s point of view was correct. “That’s probably a good idea. I think I might do the same. It’s not as if I haven’t got enough to do without adding another girlfriend to the mix.”

Hermione didn’t know whether to laugh or cry at Harry’s response even though she knew she’d invoked it, so she settled for slight sarcasm instead. “Want to avoid another Cho fiasco, do we?”

“Someone talking about my girlfriend?” A voice asked as the carriage door flew open.

Both Harry and Hermione groaned as Jamie Potter walked in.

“What do you want?” Harry was feeling far from charitable towards his brother.

“Well, it’s not to apologize if that’s what you’re expecting.” Jamie informed him.

Harry snorted. “As if I’d accept it anyway after the way you’ve been acting.”

Jamie frowned. He’d expected Harry to try and make things up with him. He’d imagined a grand scene where Harry begged for one more chance and he’d turned him down. “As I said, I’m not offering. I’ve just come to warn you to keep away from my girlfriend, particularly after the way you treated her.”

“Exactly what do you mean by that?” Harry barked out.

“You know very well what you did, Lupin.” Jamie leant forward trying to look intimidating.

Harry almost laughed. After seeing his Dad and the alternate version of himself in action, Jamie came across as a rank amateur. “I don’t know what pack of lies she’s fed you, Potter but...”

Jamie interrupted and drew his wand. “My girlfriend is not a liar.”

“Whatever you say.” Harry didn’t move. “You’re welcome to each other. Now get out.”

Jamie narrowed his eyes. “Don’t forget. Keep away from her or else.”

“Or else what, Mr. Potter?” Severus’ silky tones drifted into the carriage.

Jamie gulped and turned to face his teacher. “Nothing Sir.”

“It didn’t sound like nothing to me. And your wand drawn as well. Tut! Tut!” Severus pulled himself up to his full height, dwarfing Jamie. “I think 20 points from Gryffindor and a detention with Mr. Filch every Friday for a month for threatening another student.”

Jamie didn’t say anything.

"Well, boy, what you are waiting for? Get out!" Severus snapped.

Jamie didn't need any further prompting and fled, just as Harry dropped his head into his lap and groaned.

"May I ask what the problem is, Mr. Lupin?" Severus didn't sound as if he cared.

Harry looked up, undaunted by the severity of Severus' tone. "I've got detention with Filch every Friday for a month as well. I'll have to spend hours looking at Potter's ugly face."

Severus struggled to hide his smile. "You'll be serving your detentions with me instead." Severus turned to Hermione. "You'll be attending as well. I expect both of you to keep at your meditation exercises as we'll be moving on to the practical side of your animagus training within the next few weeks."

Harry was hard pushed to hide his elation. "Thank you Sir."

Severus didn't bother to hide his smile this time. "You're welcome, Harry."

"What's your Dad doing here?" Harry asked as Severus left the carriage.

"He offered. He said he wanted to take the opportunity to catch up with your Dad and Professor Flitwick." Hermione herself had been surprised when Severus first mentioned he would be taking the train with her.

Harry had a feeling that Severus' presence had something to do with the other night, but he couldn't see what Professor Flitwick had to do with it. Deciding that he was probably barking up the wrong tree, he said nothing.

Hermione then brought up the very night he had just been thinking about. "So Harry, what happened on New Year's Eve?" Hermione had been disappointed when Professor Lupin had shown up and said

that no-one could make it, and had then hotfooted it out of Hogwarts together with her father.

Harry didn't really want to lie but he knew he couldn't tell the truth, so he settled on skirting around the issue. "Pettigrew tried to kidnap Scarlett. Felidae overpowered him but he eventually escaped."

"Poor Scarlett. Is she okay?" Hermione shuddered at the thought of Pettigrew trying to kidnap the sweet little girl.

Harry shook his head. "Not really. I overheard Dad offering to obliviate her this morning, but Mum wouldn't let him. Scar's now afraid of her own shadow and spent most of the last two nights asleep with Mum and Grim watching over. Mum and Grim had to take turns yesterday trying to get some sleep during the day."

"Grim as in Uncle Grim?" Hermione queried.

"Since Pettigrew escaped we've been staying with Luna's uncle." Harry had been surprised to be woken by his Dad telling him to pack up a few things just after he had fallen asleep on New Year's Eve. "Your Dad put up wards around the place while Grim helped everyone move in."

"Is your Mum seeing Grim?" Hermione asked.

Harry laughed. "I asked Dad the same thing. Apparently they're just friends."

Hermione smiled. "It's good that she's got a friend like that."

Anything Harry might have said had to wait, as the carriage door opened again, this time to reveal Fred and George.

George stepped in and groaned. "Not more lovebirds."

Harry pulled a face. "Very funny, George."

Daphne suddenly stepped out from behind Fred and held out her hand towards her friend. "Look, Hermione."

Hermione dutifully did as she was told. On Daphne's left ring finger sat a small silver and diamond ring. Hermione let out a squeal. "You're engaged?"

Daphne laughed and shook her head. "Don't be daft. It's a promise ring. Fred gave it to me on Christmas morning." Daphne smiled dreamily at Fred, who leered at his girlfriend.

Harry turned to George. "How about you George? Any hot romantic news about you and Angelina?"

George's face became glum. "Fat chance. Angie dumped me."

"But why?" Hermione had pegged George and Angie as a 'forever' couple.

Fred laughed. "Because he gave her a joke set for Christmas. He couldn't understand why she didn't like it."

Daphne nudged Fred in the ribs. "Don't be so mean."

"Perhaps she'll forgive you. Why don't you buy her some chocolates and apologize?" Hermione suggested.

"I've already tried that. I ended up wearing them." George sat down. "Can I stay here with you guys? Having to sit with that pair is nauseating."

Fred rudely stuck out his tongue at his brother. "Come on, Daffs, let's make the most of a little privacy."

Daphne blushed as her boyfriend grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the carriage.

"They've done nothing but snog since they first got on the train." George complained.

Harry decided to try and divert George. "Invented any good products lately?"

It worked. George happily babbled to Harry about his latest creation as Harry flashed Hermione an apologetic smile. Hermione just grinned and settled down to read one of the textbooks she brought with her.

Next chapter: We find out what is happening with Peter and how Voldemort really found out about the Potters.

Chapter 35: Memories

2nd January 1994

After the feast had finished, the Ravenclaw friends bid Hermione goodnight and headed off towards their tower. On arriving, Harry collapsed onto a sofa and Luna and Dudley squeezed in beside him. Draco and George flopped down opposite them.

Harry hadn't really had much time to speak to Draco during dinner and was anxious to learn how his Christmas had gone. "So Draco, how did your holiday go?"

"It was great. You're not going to believe it. Dad..." Draco had barely begun when Harry interrupted.

"Draco, since when do you call Craig Dad?" Harry asked.

"I don't. I'm talking about my real father." Draco told Harry, grinning at the surprised look on Harry's face. "Lucius told me to call him Dad; he said he wanted us to try and start a new relationship."

"I'm surprised your mother let you go in the first place." Luna knew from Draco that Narcissa had been against the entire thing ever since Lucius had suggested it.

"Craig talked her around." Draco admitted. "I was as surprised as you when she told me on Christmas Eve that I could go."

"So, you were about to say something about your Dad." George was nosy and wanted to know what Draco had been about to say.

Draco smiled dreamily. "Dad bought me a new broom; it's in our room. I'll show it to you later."

Dudley's ears pricked up at the mention of the broom. "What did you get?"

"A Firebolt." Draco grinned.

George groaned. "You lucky devil; they've only just come out."

Draco's grin grew even wider. "I know."

"So now that you've shown off about what your Dad got you, tell us about your brothers and sisters." Harry was more interested in Draco's family than the broom; although the broom came a close second.

Draco looked around the room before speaking; he didn't want Pansy overhearing him. "Fen and Matt are revolting; they're just like their mother; cold and snobby. Petra's a complete bitch. I don't know why Dad married her."

"Pansy's sister's really like that?" Luna asked.

Draco nodded. "I don't particularly like her."

"Who does like their stepmother?" Dudley asked. "They were always evil in the fairytales Mum used to tell us when we were little."

Luna laughed. "That's just in the fairytales, Dudley."

"Dudley's right. She IS a bit of an evil stepmother. Uncle Sirius told me that she has a bit of a reputation for..." Here Draco lowered his voice. "For sleeping with other men."

Harry's face fell at the mention of someone else who was being unfaithful. Luna saw the look and squeezed Harry's hand. She swiftly redirected the conversation. "What were the other two children like?"

Draco's face lit up. "They're great. Sophia and Will look like miniatures of me."

George guffawed. "Poor little blighters."

Draco stuck out his tongue. "It could be worse; they could look like you."

The five children laughed out loud, drawing the attention of the two girls who had just walked into the tower. Harry looked at Luna. "When did that pair get together?"

Luna shrugged. "I've no idea."

"I might know." Draco surprised everyone with his remark. "When I was in France, Pansy was there too. She said that she was writing to Cho now that she had moved into her dormitory."

"Great." Harry scowled. "I'll have them both moaning about what a lousy boyfriend I was."

"What do you mean, was?" Draco didn't know that Harry and Cho had split up.

Harry filled Draco in. "...Jamie, Jamie, Jamie. I wish I'd never gone out with her in the first place."

Draco laughed. "Don't worry; you won't be alone in being shunned. I turned Pansy down at Christmas. Can you believe she asked me out?"

"Even though you took Auri to the Yule Ball?" Dudley knew that Auri wouldn't be happy about Pansy, even though Draco had turned her down.

"Even after I did that." Draco shook his head. "I couldn't believe it. I was happy to be her friend but the thought of going out with my stepmother's sister isn't exactly appealing." Draco shuddered.

"You didn't tell her that did you?" Luna wanted to know.

Draco nodded. "Yep. She didn't speak to me for the rest of the holiday. I know she and Cho were furiously writing to each other up until we returned to school. In fact, Pansy returned a day early just so that she could ride the express with Cho."

Harry's scowl grew even bigger. "This just keeps getting better and better. Cho is back with Jamie, and Pansy is her new best friend."

George smiled ruefully. "Looks as though I'm with the right group then, seeing as Angie dumped me and I'm now an unmentionable too."

Luna got up and jumped onto George's lap. "We all love you."

Dudley laughed at Luna's antics. "Yeah, George. We all really, really love you."

George stuck up his middle finger at Dudley, and turned to Luna. "Why don't you dump this loser and run away with me?"

Luna looked as if she was considering George's offer but then she shook her head. "I'm afraid not, George. Dudley has something you'll never have." She then jumped off George's lap and slid back into her original spot.

George held a hand to his heart, pretending to feel wounded. "And that would be?"

"My heart." Luna smiled sweetly at Dudley, who blushed.

George pretended to vomit and turned to Draco and Harry. "What say we leave these lovebirds to it?"

"You mean you want to see what my Dad bought me, don't you?" Draco asked.

George nodded. "Of course."

Draco pulled Harry to his feet. "Dudley, you coming?"

Dudley looked pitifully at Luna who pushed him away from her. "Go on then."

Dudley shot off and Luna curled up on the sofa. She knew that they'd probably be extolling the Firebolt's virtues until the early hours; well at least Dudley and Draco would. After yawning several times, Luna decided that she'd probably fall asleep if she didn't move, so she got up and headed for the dormitories.

Birmingham, UK

Peter was exhausted; he'd been walking for two days. The act of apparating out of the cavern had just about taken him to the limits of his endurance; he found apparating difficult without a wand and being injured had just compounded the matter. Not being able to face splinching himself, he'd resorted to walking instead. After walking up a muggle street, not far from where he used to live, Peter finally came across a house that looked abandoned. After checking no-one was watching, he transformed into his rat form and, after finding a small opening in the front of the house, crawled tiredly in. Unable to find the energy to transform back, Peter curled up under a chair and fell asleep.

The next day Peter woke up, feeling a little better. After rummaging around the house, Peter found a copy of an airline reservation which told him that the owner wouldn't be back for several days. Happily Peter found the bathroom, stripped off his dirty and shredded clothing and started to run a shower. Finding a clean towel, Peter stepped into the shower and let the hot water run over him, flinching as it pounded the cuts Felidae had inflicted on his chest. Eventually he had to get out and, after finding a first aid kit, rummaged through it until he found some burns cream. After treating himself and finding some clothes to fit him in the master bedroom, Peter set off for the kitchen.

After cooking a meal, Peter wandered into the living room and switched on the TV. Not finding anything to watch, he switched it off and lay back on the sofa. As he tried to get comfortable he thought about the previous few days. He knew that he shouldn't have threatened Remus' daughter but he'd been at his wits' end. Finding out that Remus had been a death eater had been heartbreaking. It looked as though James had been right about not picking Remus for his secret-keeper, not that it had done him any good anyway. Peter had been telling the truth when he'd told Remus he'd been the secret-keeper and that he hadn't given the Potters up and he began to think about James as he started to drift off to sleep.

19th October 1981

Peter Pettigrew yawned as he got up and headed downstairs. Despite being a wizard, Peter had returned to the muggle world to work. He hadn't been able to get a job in the wizarding world except as a stock boy in a seedy store on Knockturn Alley. Not wanting to be compared to James and Sirius who had both joined the auror corps, Peter had therefore looked outside the wizarding world, and had been able to find a well-paid job as a bank clerk.

A tap at the window signified the delivery of the mail and Peter opened the window to let his owl, *Souris*, in. Peter poured himself a cup of tea from the pot his mother had made and sat down to read the Prophet. As he opened it up, the headlines stood out in large bold letters.

Sirius Black – Friend or Foe

It has been reported that Sirius Black, the good friend and colleague of rising auror, James Potter, has gone missing. James Potter is, of course, the son of the former head of the Auror Division, Harold Potter who also disappeared less than a week ago. Was Black kidnapped like Harold Potter, or is there a more sinister reason behind his disappearance? It has been rumored that Black, whose family are known sympathizers of You-Know-Who (see page 6 for more details), is the secret-keeper for James and Lily Potter, whose whereabouts are currently unknown.

Black's previous girlfriend, Emily Proditor, has been telling friends that she believes her ex-boyfriend may not be the shining example of the light he has been held up to be. She claims that while he doesn't possess the dark mark, he still owns a black robe with a hood, and quite often disappears at night (see page 12 – How to Spot a Death Eater). Is this enough to convict Black of being in league with You-Know-Who or is it just a case of a woman spurned?

Peter couldn't believe it. There was no way his friend was a Death Eater. Peter had lost count of the times Sirius had besmirched his mother's name and that of his now dead brother, Regulus. Also Peter knew that Sirius wasn't the secret-keeper. When James and Lily had decided to go into hiding, James had admitted that they had intended to make Sirius their secret-keeper but that he was too well known as

being James' best friend. He'd told Peter that he'd had therefore chosen someone a little less likely to be suspected but he hadn't told him who it was.

Peter had wondered whether James had picked Remus but James had denied it. Peter wasn't surprised by James' reluctance to choose Remus. With Voldemort recruiting more and more dark creatures, he wouldn't have wanted to take a chance in using a werewolf to be his secret-keeper either, no matter how friendly he was with him. Peter had to admit though that he missed seeing Remus who, ever since leaving school, was rarely around, and when he was, he usually had one girl or another in tow with him.

Madeline Pettigrew waddled into the dining room. Once a pretty muggle, she was now overweight and drank too much. "Off to work, Petey?"

Peter hated his mother's nickname for him. "In a minute. I'm just reading the news before I go."

"Well don't forget your sandwiches." Madeline grabbed the cup of tea she had just poured and headed out of the dining room.

Peter knew from the sandwiches and pot of tea, that this was one of his mother's better days. Usually he was lucky she remembered his name.

Peter looked at the time and knew he had to go.

1st November 1981

Peter had made the most of his lie-in and didn't get up until after 10am. His mother was sitting in the kitchen dressed only in a shabby dressing gown. "That owl brought you a paper. It says that someone's dead."

"Can't you remember who died?" Peter asked as he poured himself a bowl of rice krispies.

His mother shook her head. "They didn't give a name." She picked up the paper. "Oh, here it is, 'You-Know-Who: Dead and Gone?'"

Peter dropped his bowl of cereal and, ignoring the mess, he reached out to grab the paper from his mother.

'You-Know-Who: Dead and Gone?'

The wizarding world is today celebrating as it appears that You-Know-Who may finally have met his match in the young son of rising auror, James Potter. The exact events of yesterday evening aren't yet known but it is believed that You-Know-Who tracked the Potters down to their home and broke in, killing James Potter.

Peter let out a moan as he read that James was dead. He couldn't understand how Voldemort had found them. Peter read on.

'Lily Potter is currently in critical condition at St. Mungo's Hospital. Their son was found in his bedroom bleeding profusely from a head wound, only feet away from the body of his father and the cloak and mask of You-Know-Who. Conjecture abounds that somehow You-Know-Who tried to kill young Mr. Potter and failed. No trace of You-Know-Who has been found and his wand has still not been recovered as we go to print.

We can only hope that the terror that has gripped our world has finally been eradicated. More on this breaking news in a special afternoon edition.'

Peter couldn't believe that James was dead. He'd only seen him two weeks ago.

October 13th 1981

Peter heard a banging at the door and sat up. Looking at his bedside clock he noticed that it was four am. Running down to answer the door, he thankfully realized that his mother hadn't stirred. Opening the door he found James Potter standing there.

“James, what the hell are you doing here?” Peter pulled his friend in out of the rain that was falling heavily.

“Nice to see you too Pete.” James shrugged off his muggle coat. “It’s certainly wet out there.”

“For crying out loud, James. You’re supposed to be in hiding, not taking a walk in the rain.” Peter castigated his friend.

James answered flippantly. “What can I say; I felt like a stroll in the fresh air.”

“Are you mad?” Peter couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “What if You-Know-Who spots you?”

James laughed. “As if he’s likely to be walking up a muggle street in the suburbs of Birmingham at 4am in the morning.”

Peter realized he had a point and let out the breath he hadn’t realized he’d been holding. “You’re right. You just startled me.”

“I’m sorry.” James didn’t look sorry. He walked into the sitting room where he sat down and looked pointedly at Peter. “What no drink?”

Peter shook himself. “Sorry, what can I get you?”

“Do you have any muggle cider?” James had developed a partiality to the fermented muggle drink after Lily introduced him to it.

Peter nodded. “I’m sure we do. Mum went shopping and she always like a good variety. Drink is just about the only thing she remembers to buy.”

James looked sympathetic. “Is she still drinking heavily?”

“Even since Dad died she’s done nothing else.” Peter padded off to the kitchen and opened up the fridge. “We’ve got Strongbow or Woodpecker; which would you prefer?”

“Strongbow.” James called out.

Peter came back with a can of Strongbow for James and Woodpecker for himself. James shuddered as he looked at Peter's choice. "I don't know how you can drink that stuff. It's far too sweet."

Peter shrugged. "Strongbow's too strong for me. I've been sick far often after drinking it."

James laughed. "Still can't hold your drink, Pete?"

Peter ignored the question. "I don't believe you've come here for a drink you could have bought at the off-license, so why are you here?"

"I suppose you read about the increase in muggle abductions that have been taking place recently?" James didn't answer Peter's questions, instead responding with one of his own.

"How do you know about that?" Peter figured that James either obtained backdated copies of the Prophet or somehow he was still receiving news.

Peter's suspicions were confirmed when James answered. "We still get copies of the Prophet."

"But how?" Peter asked.

James shook his head. "That doesn't matter right now."

"Speaking of the Prophet, I was sorry to read about your father." Peter told his friend.

Thanks; I just hope he's alright." James grimaced. He knew that the chances weren't good that he would ever see his father alive again.

"Me too." Peter took a huge swallow of his cider, and reissued his earlier question. "I know you're not here to talk about your father, so what is it you want?"

"We need you to take over being our secret-keeper." James dropped his bombshell and sat back on the sofa.

Peter couldn't believe James' request. "What happened to your current one?"

"We've just found out that she's been captured by Lord Voldemort. We don't know how long she'll last before she breaks. I can't afford for our whereabouts to become known." James told his friend. "Will you do it?"

Despite James' predicament, Peter was still finding it difficult to believe that James Potter actually wanted something from him. "You honestly want me to do it?"

James nodded. "You live here in the middle of a large muggle city. I should really have picked you before. I mean, what are the chances of You-Know-Who looking you up?"

Peter swallowed hard. He'd never been the brave one at the school, always willing to follow James' and Sirius' lead. Remus had never been a leader but then again he'd never shied away from standing up for himself as Peter so often had. "I don't know. I don't think I could face up to You-Know-Who if he came here looking for you. I would have said yes, but with all the muggle abductions lately..."

James looked desolate at Peter's response. "I understand."

Peter backtracked at the bleak look on James' face; he couldn't bear to upset anyone. "You're probably right about You-Know-Who not looking for me in the middle of the city." Peter felt his heart racing and wondered if he was making a mistake. "Can I have a few hours to think about it?"

Not having any other option, as Dumbledore had already turned him down and Sirius was too obvious a target, James agreed. "Of course."

"So how is Lily?" Peter asked politely. Lily had never seemed to take to him despite the fact that Peter had gone out of his way to try to be friendly to her.

“Going mental from being cooped up.” James told his friend. “I’ve lost count of how many dishes I’ve had to repair after she’s thrown them up the wall in frustration. To be honest, she’s driving me nuts.”

Peter shook his head. “You know you love her.”

James grinned widely. “Despite her bad moods, I do, and unfortunately she knows it! She smiles that little smile of hers and I’m a sucker for whatever she wants. I’ve lost count of how many times I’ve had to change Jamie’s nappy when it’s supposed to be her turn.”

“Boy or girl?” Peter asked.

“HIS name is actually James Sirius Potter but we call him Jamie.” He’d been about to tell Peter about Harry, when a noise from upstairs made James jump.

“It’s Mum.” Peter pulled a face. “She’s probably coming down for something to drink.”

James stood up. “I’ll be back tonight.”

Peter watched as James apparated away.

The woman had thought it a waste of time to spy on Pettigrew, but her Lord had deemed otherwise. Now it appeared that he’d had been correct after all. She wondered whether she should leave and report, or stay where she was. Deciding it was best to report back, she left the room and went upstairs into the bathroom, where she disappeared.

Lord Voldemort moved swiftly into his antechambers. He had been alerted that one of his spies had returned with news about the Potters.

The woman bowed low as the Dark Lord entered the room.

“So what news do you have for me?” Voldemort left her bent over for a moment, before allowing her to rise.

“Potter visited his friend as you suspected he would. Apparently you’ve captured his current secret-keeper and he plans to make Pettigrew his new one. Pettigrew has asked for more time to decide and Potter will return tonight.” The woman informed her master. “Also, Potter mentioned his son, a child named Jamie.”

“So the Potters’ secret keeper must be Lily Potter’s grandmother, despite her protestations of innocence otherwise.” Voldemort smiled unpleasantly. “Return and keep watch. If Pettigrew agrees, then follow them and learn where they are hiding. If my men fail to extract the information I need from the muggle, you must provide me with the location of the Potters.”

The woman didn’t know how she was going to do it but she agreed anyway and bowed low. “Yes, my Lord.”

Voldemort swept out of the room. He wondered how James Potter had found out that they had captured Violet Gladstone. He knew that he must have an outside contact somewhere. Unfortunately the woman had so far refused to co-operate despite being tortured. He knew that he couldn’t get the information from her via Veritaserum, so had had to resort to more basic methods. If he could get the information from her, he would so.

Opening the cell door, he marched up to Violet. “Are you ready to talk yet, my dear? If you do, I promise to make your death a quick and painless one.”

Violet looked up from the floor of the cell at the madman who was trying to find out where her granddaughter and husband were located. Holding her head high, she told him, “I survived the war; I can certainly cope with anything you throw at me.”

Voldemort changed tack. “Did you know that your granddaughter has a child now?”

Violet wondered how Voldemort had found out. “You’re lying.”

"You already knew she was pregnant. You can't lie to me." Voldemort sneered, all pretence at civility gone. "If you tell me where they are hiding, I will spare your granddaughter."

Violet knew that nothing would make her give up Lily's location. "You don't know how to find them and I'm not going to tell you."

"So be it." Voldemort turned to the two guards at the door. "Take her to the cavern. Place her in the section behind the bars. I want her to see what's going to happen to her if she doesn't co-operate." Returning his attention to Violet, Voldemort smirked. "You couldn't have picked a better night to refuse my offer, my dear."

After Voldemort's final comment, Violet found herself being led out of the cell. She had a feeling she wouldn't be seeing the inside of the cell again. As she was led away, she wondered what the cavern was.

Pettigrew's Home

James waited until dusk began to fall, before knocking on Peter's door.

Peter answered the door. "Come in."

James got straight to the point. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

Having decided that this could be his moment to shine, Peter nodded. "I'll do it."

James let out a sigh of relief. "Thanks, Pete. I knew you wouldn't let me down." James looked apologetically at Peter. "We really need to go now. I don't know how much longer it'll be before our secret-keeper provides You-Know-Who with the knowledge he requires."

"Mum, I'll be back in a bit." Peter yelled out to his Mum who was resting in the sitting room. After grabbing his coat, Peter felt James take him by the arm as he apparated them both out of the house.

On arrival, Peter could see the outline of an unlit cottage in the failing daylight. "What do I need to do?"

James passed him a piece of paper. "You'll need to say those words as I cast the charm."

Peter couldn't quite see the paper and cast Lumos.

Suddenly a shiver ran through the ground, and a flash of light surrounded the cottage. James paled. "Peter, you've got to do it now."

James then proceeded to cast the charm as Peter spoke the words to create the safe haven James and his family needed. As Peter finished speaking, he felt magic wash over him as the house shimmered but didn't disappear from view.

"Thanks, Pete." James let out a sigh of relief. "I thought it was going to be too late for a moment there."

"The wards fell didn't they?" Peter asked.

"They did." James absently ran his hand through his hair. "Look Pete, I'd ask you to come in but I think Lily is going to need me right now."

"Who was your secret-keeper?" Peter knew it had to have been a relative of Lily's from James' comment.

"Lily's grandmother." James looked saddened.

"I'm sorry about Lily's grandmother, James." Peter knew it must have been a hard choice for James and Lily to pick a relative. He held out his hand to James. "Take care of yourself and give Lily my love."

"I will. Don't be a stranger." James shook hands and headed off towards the cottage.

Peter watched as James disappeared inside and then he disappeared.

The Next Day

Peter got home from work to find his mother waiting anxiously for him by the door. "Petey, there's a woman here to see you. She's been back several times already."

Peter looked round the door into the sitting room. "Lily, what are you doing here? Is James alright?"

"Peter, it's wonderful to see you." Lily launched herself at the small man.

Peter was a little surprised by the ebullient welcome he received from Lily; she'd never been that friendly before. "Lily, it's, err, nice to see you too."

"Peter, James is fine but I need your help." Lily sat back down and patted the sofa beside her.

Feeling a little uncomfortable, Peter sat down next to her. "What can I do for you?"

"You know when James asked you to be our secret-keeper he forgot to ask you for something." Lily picked up the glass of water at her elbow and sipped from it.

"What was it?" Peter asked.

"He forgot to ask you to tell our outside contact that we'd changed secret-keeper." Lily told him.

"Dumbledore's your outside contact, isn't he?" Peter couldn't think of anyone else.

Lily neither confirmed nor denied Peter's supposition. "I can't tell you who it is. All I can say is that our contact has been our lifeline to the outside world. Without him I'd have been lost; he's been such a wonderful mentor to me." Lily sniffed a little into a handkerchief she produced from her pocket. "I'm sorry, Peter, but after last night..."

Peter suddenly remembered the wards falling and who James had told him had been the secret-keeper. "I'm sorry about your grandmother."

Lily's face crumpled. "I'll never see her again."

Peter watched as Lily struggled to compose herself. "Lily, after what happened with your grandmother, why didn't James come?"

"He wanted to but I needed to get out; to try and distract myself from the bad news." Lily sighed heavily. "It's been so hard stuck in that cottage all the time, seeing the same faces day in day out."

Peter felt sorry for Lily; he knew that he would have gone mad if it had been him. "What do you want me to do?"

"I need you write down where we are. I can't tell my mentor as he'd only forget as soon as I told him." Lily told him.

Peter knew that as the secret-keeper, only he could tell someone where to find the Potters. "Okay."

Peter picked up a pen and searched for a piece of a paper as Lily continued talking. "I don't know what I would have done without the guidance I've been receiving from my mentor so what you are doing means the world to me."

Peter smiled absently as finally found a piece of paper. Not entirely clear on what to do next, Peter asked Lily. "What exactly do you want me to write?"

"Just write where we, the Potters, can be found." Lily instructed.

Peter wrote down 'The Potters can be found at Godric's Hollow'. He looked expectantly at Lily.

"Now tell me that it's for my mentor." Lily smiled encouragingly.

Peter passed her the piece of paper and said "This is for your mentor."

Lily took the paper and put it into her pocket. "I've got to go now."

"Are you sure you wouldn't like to stay for something to eat?" Peter offered.

Lily shook her head. "James will be worried if I'm much longer, and I still need to deliver this note."

"Lily, be careful." Peter warned. "You-Know-Who's men could be anywhere."

"I don't think I need to worry about them." Lily smiled. "Thanks for your help, Peter."

Peter blushed. "It's nothing, Lily. Take care."

"I will." Lily went to open the door.

"Why don't you apparate out?" Peter suggested.

"I'd prefer to walk for a while. Who knows how long it will be before I have the chance to walk down a muggle street again." Lily told him as she opened the door. "Thanks again, Peter. Your help has been invaluable."

Peter waved off her thanks and watched as she walked down the road and turned up a side street, eventually disappearing from view.

1st November 1981

That had been the last time Peter had seen James and Lily. He couldn't believe that James was gone and Lily was lying dangerously ill in St. Mungo's. Even more so, he couldn't understand how Voldemort had gotten to them. Madeline looked at her son's white face. "Petey, what's wrong?"

"James is dead." Peter threw the paper onto the table and despite the earliness of the hour, opened the fridge and pulled out a beer.

“That nice boy you used to hang around with?” Madeline vaguely remembered a pleasant bespectacled boy who had visited a few times during Peter’s school years.

Peter nodded, surprised that his mother actually recalled him. “He was killed by You-Know-Who.”

“Who?” Madeline asked.

“You-Know-Who” Peter said again.

“I don’t know who.” Madeline had already forgotten reading the news headline.

“For crying out loud, Lord Bloody Voldemort, that’s who.” Peter snapped.

Madeline looked upset. “There’s no need to shout.”

Peter reigned in his rarely used temper. “Sorry Mum. It’s just that Lord Voldemort is the biggest threat to our existence for a long time.”

“Why call him You-Know-Who? Why not just call him Voldemort? He’s only a man after all.” Madeline couldn’t understand what the big fuss was about.

Peter had gone over this with his mother time and time again, only for her to forget it every time. He patiently explained again. “I’ve told you before, Mum. Everyone’s scared of him. To our kind, he’s more than just some man. People are frightened that he’ll appear and kill them if they mention his name, so they call him You-Know-Who or He Who Must Not be Named.”

Madeline frowned. “How can you be scared of someone’s name?”

Peter gave up. “It doesn’t matter Mum.”

Madeline’s train of thought drifted elsewhere and she wandered off out of the room. Peter sighed and put his head into his hands. He

didn't need the stress of dealing with his mother on top of what was happening in the wizarding world.

One week later

Peter had thought that things couldn't get any worse. On picking up the afternoon edition of the Prophet, he found out just how wrong he could be as he read the two paragraph statement that they had managed to slip in just before the paper went to print.

Sirius Black Guilty of Potter Slaying: Sirius Black was today found injured but alive in Knockturn Alley. Despite pleading innocent to being the Potter's secret-keeper, papers provided by Black's former girlfriend, Emily Proditor, reveal otherwise. They have also brought to light the secret double life being led by Black.

Black is currently being interviewed by Aurors before being shipped to Azkaban. More on this news in tomorrow morning's edition.

Peter snorted. He knew that Emily was nothing but a jealous harpy who had been trying to get Sirius back for weeks before he disappeared. He didn't believe the bit about papers and leading a double life in the slightest.

Peter then thought about Sirius in Azkaban and knew that he should tell someone that Sirius hadn't been the secret-keeper at all; he had. However, Peter couldn't face the thought that he might end up in Azkaban if he did. Sirius was much more able to deal with that kind of thing that he could. Peter felt sickened by himself; he knew he was a coward. Pulling out his wand, he incinerated the newspaper and decided to pretend that he didn't know that Sirius had been arrested and found guilty of something Peter knew he hadn't done.

"Petey, can you come and help me with the washing?" Madeline's voice drifted in from the garden.

"Coming, Mum." Peter blew the remnants of the newspaper ashes into the sink and swilled them away, before turning to go help his mother.

February 1st 1994

Harry woke up screaming again. Ever since the evening in the cavern, he'd been having the most horrible nightmares. He'd asked Professor Snape to try Legilimency again with him but he'd refused. The Professor had explained that Remus still wasn't very happy that he'd cancelled Harry's detentions with Filch without asking Remus first. Harry knew that if he hadn't had such a huge workload, his Dad would probably have reassigned them for another day. As it was, Remus had still made him attend one detention with Filch during quidditch practice.

Even now, Harry's fingers were still sore from all the scrubbing Filch had made him do. He'd kept Harry scrubbing the boys' bathrooms out with a toothbrush until the early hours of the morning. Harry hadn't dared complain to his Dad about it; he had been too worried about being reassigned the three detentions he had gotten out of serving.

His animagus training wasn't going much better either. With the lack of sleep he was suffering from, Harry hadn't been able to concentrate on meditating to try and find his form. Hermione wasn't having much luck with it either. Professor Snape had called a halt two weeks into the term, with instructions for them to practice their basic meditation exercises. Until they both mastered them, any further practical exercises were on hold.

Harry's screaming appeared to have woken Dudley up as Harry watched his brother pad across to his bed.

Dudley was alarmed at the sight of tears pouring down Harry's face. "Do you want me to get Professor Flitwick, Harry?"

Harry shook his head, his teeth chattering. "Want Dad."

"I'll go get him." Dudley disappeared downstairs to the fireplace which was hooked up to Professor Flitwick's rooms.

Filius shot out of bed as he heard the insistent pinging of the fireplace, warning him that something was wrong in Ravenclaw. Bending down he found Dudley's head floating there. "Is Harry unwell?"

Dudley nodded. "He woke up screaming and said that he wants Dad."

"Tell him, we'll both be there shortly." Flitwick watched as Dudley's head vanished. Flitwick then threw floo powder into the fireplace and had a quick conversation with Remus, agreeing to meet him at the Ravenclaw dormitories.

A short time later, Harry was tucked up on Remus' sofa clinging desperately to his Dad. "Harry, please tell us what's wrong?"

Harry couldn't get his words out for crying. Remus turned to Filius. "Can you get Severus and ask him to bring a calming potion?"

After a few minutes a tired looking Severus padded into Remus' rooms with the requisite potion. "Harry, drink this."

Harry drank it and slowly his crying subsided to a more manageable level, although his shaking still persisted.

"Dudley said you woke up screaming. Was it another nightmare?" Remus asked now that Harry had calmed down somewhat.

Harry nodded. "Don't want to talk about it."

"Harry, you might feel better if you do." Filius suggested.

Harry stubbornly shook his head. "Don't want to."

Severus stood up. "Perhaps if Filius and I were to leave you two alone for a moment?"

Remus nodded at the bedroom and both Filius and Severus went into the other room. "Do you want to tell me what happened now?"

Harry still shook his head. "It's too horrible."

"Harry, I can't help you unless you tell me what happened." Remus gently stroked Harry's back in a comforting way.

Harry took a deep breath. "You remember what happened in the cavern?"

Remus nodded. "When you had a vision, you mean?"

Harry nodded. "This one was much worse than that."

Remus wanted Severus to hear what Harry had to say. "Harry, if you wouldn't mind, I'd like to ask Professor Snape and Professor Flitwick to sit in on this."

Harry didn't really want everyone watching him but after a few moments he nodded in agreement.

Remus went into his bedroom and closed the door behind him. "I think that Harry's had another episode similar to that that happened in the cavern. It might be a good idea if you both came in and listened."

Filius stopped him from leaving the room. "What about the portrait in your room?"

Remus grinned. "I dealt with that a few days after I arrived. Sir Folger rarely hangs around here ever since I set up with the milkmaid on the fourth floor."

"You couldn't just use a spell like everyone else?" Severus asked dryly.

Remus shook his head. "More fun this way. Think how frustrating it must be for Dumbledore to know that his spy is more interested in chatting up another portrait than watching me. He can hardly place another portrait in here; it would be too suspicious even though I'm still supposed to be his lackey."

Filius laughed. "I like it. The real Flitwick refused outright to have one in his rooms. He told Dumbledore they gave him the creeps."

Severus shook his head. "If you two have finished swapping stories, I think we should get back to Harry."

Severus left the bedroom and went back into the sitting room where Harry was huddled up on the sofa with a blanket wrapped around his knees. Severus knelt down. "I know it's hard for you, Harry, but take your time, and if you want us to leave, you just need to ask."

Harry smiled a little tremulously at his professor. "Thanks, Sir."

Remus re-took his seat next to Harry and put his arm around him. "So you were saying about the cavern incident."

Harry looked at Professor Flitwick, who hurried to reassure the boy. "I already know all about it. I'll explain later."

Harry swallowed hard and started again. "Remember during my vision that I said that Potter was trying to find out where Dad's counterpart was being held?"

Severus and Remus both nodded. Filius just leant back against the chair he was seated in and smiled encouragingly at Harry.

Harry tried to continue. "Potter, Herms and..." He stopped speaking. "I can't do this, Dad. I just can't."

Seeing that Harry was becoming distressed again, Filius stood up. "I have a pensieve in my room. Perhaps if we used that?" He suggested.

Remus nodded, and so Filius left to retrieve his pensieve. Once he returned, Remus instructed Harry on how to retrieve the memory and place it in the pensieve.

"Okay, Harry. We're going to look into the pensieve and view your memory. You can go and lie down in the bedroom if you want to." Remus told his son.

Harry shook his head. "I'm fine on the sofa."

Remus looked at the two other men. "Are you ready?"

The two men nodded and together the three of them touched the surface of the pensieve. Harry was surprised to see that they were still there but had become motionless.

Harry's Memory

"This should be where he's being held. Any signs of movement?" Potter turned to Shack who shook his head. "Herms, do you want to check and see whether you can spot anyone?"

Herms disappeared and a small furry squirrel stood her in place. She quickly scampered off, before returning a short time later. "There's no-one guarding this place; I don't know about inside though. I scaled the trees but couldn't see anyone in the rooms I could look into. It looks as if this place has been deserted for years."

"If that little rat has double-crossed me, I'm going to make him wish he'd never been born." Potter snarled. "Let's go."

The small group of five stealthily made their way across the open grounds of the house, checking for any wards or traps that might have been placed in their way. Finding none, they eventually reached the large front door, which easily gave way to Snape's hard push. Snape entered first, wand drawn. There was no sign that anyone had ever been there. The group all entered the house after him. Snape swung round as he heard a slight noise coming from a staircase that led downstairs to what appeared to be a basement.

Making his way down the stairs, Snape could see the door at the bottom of the stairs was slight ajar. He pushed it open and looked in. What he saw nearly made him vomit. He turned quickly. "Don't go in there."

"Is Remus in there?" Potter pushed forward.

Severus nodded. "Let me deal with it."

Potter ignored him and pushed past. "Oh my God, Remus."

Potter was nearly bowled off his feet by Tonks rushing past him, only for her to come to an abrupt halt. "What have they done to him?" Tonks' voice was shaking and barely audible.

Severus who was standing right by her answered her question. "Silver nitrate."

Tonks was crying now, tears streaming down her face. "Do something. He's obviously in pain."

Remus was bare from the waist upwards and kneeling in an almost unnatural position; chains locked around his wrist preventing him from collapsing forward. From his position, it was obvious to the onlookers that both of his legs were broken, as was one of his arms. Slashes of varying sizes and shapes covered his chest, face and arms, and a blue-grey substance was leaking out from them. Little of his skin remained intact; most of it was blackened with a silvery hue. He wasn't conscious but a low continual moan emanated from his lips which had also lost their natural pink hue.

An unpleasant almost cloying smell pervaded the entire room; it reminded Filius of rotting meat.

Tonks reached forward and gently stroked Remus' hair; she was too afraid to touch him anywhere else. "Remus, honey. It's Dora. It's going to be alright."

The three men in the pensieve watched the scene with horror and dismay; all of them knew that it wasn't going to be alright.

Remus stirred slightly at Tonks' words. "Dora?" His voice sounded harsh and was barely understandable.

Tonks smiled through her tears. "Yes, Remus. It's me. We're going to get you out of here."

"Kill me." Remus whispered.

"It's going to be okay. Don't worry." Tonks lifted her wand to release Remus from his chains, only for Snape to pull her away. "What are you doing? Let go of me."

Snape nodded at Potter who, with tears in his eyes, shook his head. "I can't do it."

Tonks had obviously worked out what they were planning to do as she started to struggle in Snape's arms. Potter quickly stupefied her before she could get free.

"I'll take her. Do whatever it is you need to do." Shack took Tonks from Snape, and strolled out of the room.

Potter moved over to Remus, his voice breaking as he spoke. "I'm sorry we didn't get here sooner."

Remus was struggling to speak at all. "kay, Harry. Not fault."

Herms turned away as Snape pulled out his wand, and hesitated.

Remus lifted his head and looked Snape in the eye. "Jus' do it."

"Avada Kedavra." Snape intoned softly.

Herms burst into tears as she heard the words that ended Remus' life.

Potter on the other hand, rushed forward to release Remus from his bonds. "We're not leaving him here."

The memory then went all fuzzy and the three watchers found themselves standing back in Remus' sitting room.

Remus felt sick. He'd heard about the effects of silver nitrate but had never seen them first hand before. "Will everyone excuse me?"

Remus barely made it to the bathroom before he vomited. Shaking, he swilled out his mouth. Now he knew why Harry had found it difficult to tell him about what he had seen. He left the bathroom and returned to the others, pale but composed. "I'm sorry about that."

Harry got off the sofa and wrapped himself around Remus. "I'm scared, Dad."

"It's just a dream, Harry." Remus tried to console Harry.

Filius looked contemplative. "I don't think it is."

"What do you think it is then?" Severus asked.

"I'm not entirely sure. I need to speak to my parents." Flitwick touched his ring and an eagle stood in his place.

Harry watched as Filius flew out of Remus' window. "Wow, Professor Flitwick's got a really cool animagus."

Harry's smile soon fell off his face though as he thought about the memory that he'd placed in the pensieve. He knew he didn't want it back; after he'd placed it in the pensieve he could still remember what had happened but it felt dulled now rather than vivid. "Why couldn't they save the other Remus, Dad?"

Severus spared Remus having to answer. "Because of silver nitrate's properties. Short term exposure won't kill you but judging from Lupin's appearance, I'd say that he'd have been beyond saving even if they'd gotten to him within a few hours of the injuries being inflicted. The amount of silver nitrate that was oozing from the wounds would have been a lethal dose. Whoever did it to him had no intention of keeping him alive."

Remus shuddered. "What a horrible way to go."

Harry tightened his grip on his Dad. "Isn't there any sort of cure or antidote that can be taken?"

Severus shook his head and explained. "If it's a short exposure then you're normally fine. You might get some purple skin discoloration but that's all. It's when you've been subjected to longer exposure that problems occur. What made it worse in this case is that it looked as if Lupin had been cut and the silver nitrate poured into the open cuts."

Silver nitrate is caustic and, being a werewolf, this would have intensified the pain and effects ten-fold or more. Judging from Lupin's voice, I have a feeling that they also poured it down his throat."

Harry hadn't covered silver nitrate in his classes yet but he quickly deduced what Severus was telling him. "It was eating him away wasn't it?"

Severus nodded. "I'm afraid so. That's why there was nothing they could have done for him. He was too far gone."

Harry looked at Remus. "I don't want the memory back. It's easier to deal with it now that it's in the pensieve."

"That's because you've been left with a shadow of the memory rather than the full brunt of the memory itself." Remus told him. "If it makes you feel better then we can leave it where it is."

"I'd prefer that." Harry yawned.

A sound at the window signaled that Flitwick returned. After transforming he turned to the others. "I've arranged for my parents to come here tomorrow at seven."

Severus frowned. "What about Dumbledore?"

Filius grinned. "Don't worry about him. My father will make sure that his attention is diverted elsewhere."

"Do you need Harry here?" Remus asked.

Filius nodded. "Yes, my parents both want to speak to him."

"I'll see you both tomorrow then. I'm going to keep Harry here with me overnight." Remus told the two men as they walked towards the door.

Filius turned to Harry. "I'll arrange for a change of clothes to be brought here. Just take it easy and try to get some sleep. I think you should take a day away from classes tomorrow."

Harry smiled gratefully at his Professor. "Thank you, Sir."

Severus nodded at Harry and then Remus, and left before either of them could say anything to him.

"Let's get you to bed. It's almost midnight." Remus picked Harry up and marched into his room, turning the lights down as he shut the door behind them.

Remus had barely managed to fall asleep when Harry began thrashing and screaming again. "Harry, wake up."

Harry shot upright and vomited over the bed.

Remus was alarmed at Harry's pallor. "Harry, what's wrong?"

"I don't know." Harry was white and shaking. "I was outside and there was a stone table with a girl on it and she was screaming. Then you woke me up."

Remus pulled the covers off the bed and fetched a clean duvet. "Did this feel like one of your visions?"

Harry shook his head. "It felt different. Almost like I was dreaming."

Remus smiled as he tucked Harry up under the duvet. "It just sounds like a bad dream; possibly brought on by telling us about what happened in your nightmares earlier."

Harry relaxed at his Dad's words. "You're probably right. Sorry I woke you up."

Remus stroked Harry's head. "It's alright, Harry."

Remus watched until Harry fell asleep, before laying back and reflecting on what he had seen that night.

Two months earlier

The pair watched carefully over the cauldron, poring over their notes. A small puff of smoke later and they realized that they'd failed. The woman turned to the man. "So, another failure, Amicus."

"Don't push your luck with me, Lamia." Amicus growled at the woman. "We're missing something."

"Don't call me Lamia. I hate that name." The woman hissed.

"It's the name our Lord bestowed upon you." Amicus smiled behind his mask. "I think it's quite fitting really."

"Very amusing. Mia will do just fine." Mia snapped at him. She really hated the Dark Lord's penchant for renaming those closest to him but she also knew that it was far more disconcerting for the other death eaters not knowing who were behind the masks of the Dark Lord's personal guard. She turned to the two men standing behind her. "Bring another."

Amicus sighed heavily. "You do realize that the girl is the last muggle we have here."

Mia nodded. "Of course I do. This is also the last vial of blood." Mia held a small tube of blood to the light.

Amicus frowned. "When will you be able to obtain more?"

"Over the Christmas holidays." Mia informed him.

Goyle dragged the screaming muggle into the room.

Amicus nodded towards the stone slab. "Take her clothes off and secure her."

The girl began to beg. "Please don't hurt me. My father's rich; he'll pay you whatever you want."

Amicus walked over to the girl as Goyle fastened her down to the cold hunk of rock, and whispered in her ear. "I don't need your money, just your body."

Terrified that she was going to be raped by the masked man, the girl struggled desperately trying to free herself. "Please don't hurt me. I'll do whatever you want. Just don't hurt me."

Amicus ignored her and walked back over to the work table, where he nodded to Mia who walked over to the girl and stroked her hair. "It's going to be okay." The girl stiffened. "It will all soon be over." Mia revealed a knife making the girl scream again, and swiftly drew the knife across the girl's throat. Mia smiled as the girl's screams died down. "That's better." She then sliced open the girl's chest and deftly removed the heart, before passing it to Amicus who dropped it into the cauldron.

"Get rid of that thing." Mia snapped at Crabbe who had just come back into the room. She then moved to stand by Amicus, her attention fully focused on what he was doing. "I think we should try bay laurel this time."

"Perhaps with the corydalis." Amicus ground up both ingredients and dropped them into the cauldron where a small pile of ingredients already lay. "Pass me the blood."

Mia handed over the vial and Amicus dropped it into the cauldron. Twenty minutes later, Amicus sat back. "I think we might be on the right track."

Mia agreed. "It certainly looks like it."

"Let's just hope that we can perfect this in time." Amicus sat down heavily. They'd both been at it for nearly 48 hours and were close to exhaustion. "We need to get this right by Imbolc."

"There's always the other ceremony if this fails." Mia pointed out.

Amicus shook his head. "I've researched it carefully. If we bring him back that way, not only would one of us have to sacrifice a sizeable body part, but he wouldn't return as the same man he once was."

"What do you mean by that?" Mia asked.

“Let’s just say that he wouldn’t be the man you once found attractive enough to sleep with.” Amicus informed her.

“And this way?” Mia had done little to aid in the research; spending most of her time trying to track down her Master’s essence.

“If all goes well, the rejuvenescent qualities of the potion will restore him to the peak of health.” Amicus turned to Goyle, who was still standing there. “It’s time to go. You and Crabbe will both return in the New Year. I expect you to find me some more muggle test subjects. Don’t disappoint me, or you’ll find yourself taking their place.”

Goyle bowed low. “Of course, Amicus. I won’t let you down.”

“I know you won’t, Goyle.” Amicus strode out of the room closely followed by Mia.

Goyle shuddered. He didn’t know who the man behind the mask was, but he knew better than to disappoint him. It was rumored that you only learnt Amicus’ true identity in the moments before you died, and he had no wish to discover whether that was true or not.

Next chapter: The Flamels theorize on the cause of Harry’s visions; Slytherin v Ravenclaw quidditch match; Harry learns how to drive away the Dementors.

Chapter 36: The Twisted Timeline

This is quite a long chapter and centers mostly around Harry and Hermione.

February 2nd 1994

Remus had barely managed to fall asleep when pain lanced through his left arm. Checking that Harry was still sleeping, Remus stumbled out of bed and grabbed his wand. After closing the door behind him, he turned the lighting up and rolled back his sleeve. The Dark Mark was black and stood out in stark contrast to the pale skin of his arm. Pulling open his trunk, Remus placed his wand into a small hole and uttered a password he hadn't used for over ten years. Grabbing the mask and cloak that lay there, he quickly headed out of the room.

A few hours later

Virginie pulled open the door to find a bloody and white-faced Remus leaning against the doorjamb. Remus struggled to get out his words, his broken ribs making breathing and talking difficult. "Is Severus in?"

Virginie nodded. "Come in." She turned to walk away, only for Remus to lurch forward and collapse, sending them both tumbling to the ground.

Severus heard the crash and hurried out to the sitting room, wand drawn. His wife lay trapped beneath Remus. "What's going on?"

"Just get him off me." Virginie snapped, pushing at Remus' unconscious body.

Severus cast Mobilicorpus lifting Remus into the air and maneuvered him onto the sofa. "What the hell happened to him?"

Virginie stood up, her white nightgown now spotted with blood. "I don't know. He asked for you, only to suddenly fall on top of me."

After running his wand over Remus, Severus marched over to his cabinet and pulled out several potions, before returning to him. "Enervate."

Remus groaned as Severus lifted his head. "Drink this."

Three potions later, Remus felt able to sit up. "Thank you."

Severus sat down. "What happened?"

"Notice something?" Remus held out his arm. "I had a run in with two people I'd hoped never to cross paths with again."

Severus was fairly certain what the sight of the blackened and vivid Dark Mark meant. "I take it this means that the Dark Lord's back?"

Before Remus could answer, the sound of a gasp filled the room and everyone looked round to find Hermione standing there. "I'm sorry. I heard a crash and then voices. I just wanted to check that everything was alright." Hermione had been staying in her parents' rooms as she'd been discussing potions problems late into the evening with Severus, and she hadn't wanted to wake Daphne up by returning to their room.

Severus was obviously about to tell Hermione to go back to bed when Remus put a hand on his arm. "It's okay, Severus, she can stay."

Horried at the bloodied state of her professor, Hermione moved closer to Remus and spotted his Dark Mark. "You're a Death Eater?" Hermione hurriedly backed off.

Remus could see from Hermione's closed expression that despite her initial reaction to his injuries, she probably wasn't feeling particularly benevolent towards him at that moment. "I am."

Distressed at discovering that her favorite professor was a Death Eater, Hermione totally forgot that she wasn't supposed to mention anything about her mother's background, and swung round to face her parents. "How can you help him knowing that You-Know-Who

tried to force Mama to marry him? He's one of his servants; he'll tell You-Know-Who where Mama is."

Virginie put an arm around a panicked Hermione. "If it wasn't for Remus, I'd have still been with him or, worse, dead. He helped me to escape."

"But he's still a Death Eater." Hermione argued, afraid for her mother, in spite of what Virginie had just told her.

Remus looked across at Hermione who was being held by Virginie. "I was forced to join the Dark Lord; it wasn't my choice."

"Then whose was it?" Hermione demanded, still not quite able to believe what she hearing.

"That doesn't matter right now." Severus interjected. "Remus aided your mother to escape because he couldn't bear to see her being forced to do something she didn't want to." Severus didn't mention the rape. "I would trust him with my life."

Hermione knew that her father didn't just trust anyone and relaxed a little. "Then you're a double agent?"

Remus nodded. "Of sorts, yes."

Hermione was about to ask Remus something else when Severus interrupted them. "Hermione, before you continue with your interrogation of Remus, there's something else you should know."

Hermione listened as Severus told her how he had really met her mother and showed her his partial Dark Mark. Hermione sat down heavily, her legs refusing to bear her weight anymore. "So if you hadn't met Mama, then you'd be a Death Eater like Professor Lupin?"

Severus nodded. "Your mother saved me."

Hermione smiled tremulously. "I'm glad."

Severus squeezed her hand tightly. "So am I." He then became serious. "Hermione, whatever you hear tonight cannot be repeated. I will manufacture some more of the potion to protect your mind but, as you know, it cannot be taken on a long term basis."

Remus interrupted. "I think I may know someone who can help with that. I'll let you know once I've spoken to them."

Severus looked relieved. "Thank you."

Hermione looked at the state of Remus; she'd initially been horrified at the amount of blood that had covered him before being more appalled at the sight of his Dark Mark. "So You-Know-Who did this to you?"

Remus shook his head. "The Dark Lord's too weak; he had Him do this."

"Who's Him?" Hermione had no idea who Remus was talking about.

"Him is the Dark Lord's most faithful servant." Severus filled his daughter in.

"And you didn't put up a fight?" Hermione knew how strong Remus was and couldn't imagine him just taking this kind of abuse without defending himself.

"Hardly." Remus laughed bitterly. "I'm a skilled combatant but He outclasses me easily. He'd have killed me if I'd resisted."

"So what did the Dark Lord want from you?" Severus knew that Remus had to have been summoned for something specific. Voldemort would never have allowed anyone to see him in a weakened state without very good reason.

"The Vivificus potion and you as a werewolf." Remus said bluntly, making Hermione cry out in shock. "I don't think he was very pleased by your performance when he was after the Philosopher's Stone."

Severus paled. "And if you don't comply?"

"Then I'll be the very special guest at my family's deaths." Remus told him.

"Then it looks as if I'll be supplying the Vivificus potion for you." Severus responded. He then turned to his wife. "How do you feel about a grumpy, furry husband once a month?"

Virginie shook her head. "You can't do it, Severus."

"She's right, Severus." Remus was adamant. "I refuse to do it. I'll send my family away first."

"You can't do that. As the children are registered to attend Hogwarts, you have little choice except to let them continue attending, and you know that you can't guarantee their safety here now that the Dark Lord's back." Severus moved to the cabinet to pour himself a drink, his hand shaking slightly.

The Ministry liked to keep tabs on the families of werewolves, and forcing their children to attend a specified school was one way of achieving this. All of Remus' children were therefore registered at Hogwarts.

"Severus you can't expect me to bite you." Remus was appalled at the thought of forcing someone into the same life he had to lead. "I'd rather send my family away and face the consequences."

"You can and you will." Severus turned and passed large glasses of wine to both Virginie and Remus. Seeing Hermione's pale face, he also poured out a small amount for her. "Tell me, would you do it for my family?"

Remus knew he was defeated. "You know I would."

Hermione took the glass of wine from her father but said nothing as she sat listening to the conversation.

"Then I will do the same for you." Severus sat down. "Besides, we need someone on the inside now that he's back, and you can't do

that if you're locked up in Azkaban for failing to follow the rules. I'm sorry, Remus but this is bigger than all of us; even our families."

Remus knew Severus was right but he was aware of how frightened Severus was of werewolves and what it meant for him to offer to do this. "We've still got a while. I can't do it if Pettigrew can't be found."

"How long have you got?" Severus wondered how much of a reprieve he had before Remus would need to carry out his mission.

"I need to find Pettigrew and turn you before the end of the school year." Remus told him. "There's something else. Pettigrew didn't voluntarily give the Potters up to the Dark Lord. I don't know how he did it, but the Dark Lord took great pleasure in the fact that it's his fault that Pettigrew is being hunted for something he didn't do."

"So Pettigrew is innocent?" Hermione felt as if her entire world had been tipped upside down within the space of a few minutes.

Remus nodded curtly. "Apparently so. Unfortunately that doesn't make any difference to the Dark Lord. He's ordered me to kill him and deliver his body to the Ministry."

"You're not really going to kill Pettigrew though are you?" Hermione was dismayed that an innocent man would have to go to his death in order for Remus to complete his mission.

Remus didn't answer her question. "I need to track him down before I can do anything."

Hermione knew then that Remus would do whatever was necessary to protect his family, including killing someone who didn't deserve it. "Why is he so important, and why can't you carry out your assignment until he's found?"

"Pettigrew contacted me in the Shrieking Shack on the first night of school and I told Dumbledore, who promptly removed me from there in order for us to avoid meeting again. I need to return to the Shack in order to be able to attack your Dad. I can't return to the Shack until Pettigrew is found." Remus didn't want to kill Pettigrew but he knew

that he had little choice. "I don't want to have to kill him but I will if I have to. The Dark Lord also considers him unfinished business that he wants disposed of."

Hermione understood Remus' dilemma. She thought about her own family and what she would do if she had to protect them. "I understand, Professor."

Remus let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding. "Thank you, Hermione."

Severus thought he might have the answer to Remus' dilemma. "I have an alternative to killing Pettigrew. I can brew a variant on the polyjuice potion which will leave someone looking like Pettigrew even after their death, but first we're going to have to find someone who deserves to die in his place."

Remus looked grim. "I'm sure I can find someone."

Hermione wondered who was going to end up taking the hapless Pettigrew's place. "Will you kill a Death Eater instead?"

"I have a few options I can explore." Remus knew that Felidae could help him if necessary; he could easily access a prisoner from Azkaban if it came down to it. No-one would miss an insane Death Eater. Struggling to his feet, Remus checked the time. "I need to get back to Harry. I left him alone when I was summoned. I feel bad leaving him, especially after he had another..." Remus' voice trailed off as he realized something.

"He had another what?" Severus prompted Remus to finish his sentence.

"Harry had another nightmare not long before I was called. I told him it was just a bad dream as this time he said it felt different from his usual nightmares. I'm wondering if maybe I was wrong." Remus yawned. "I'll ask him to put the memory into a pensieve for me in the morning. I'm going to keep him away from classes as Filius suggested."

“Would you like me to cover your classes tomorrow?” Severus offered. “You can spend some time with him then.”

Remus felt relieved that he wouldn’t have to try and make it down to classes. He’d forgotten how vicious Amicus could be. “I’d appreciate it.”

Severus noticed Remus was having difficulty staying upright. “I’ll walk you back to your rooms.”

“I want to come as well.” Hermione wanted to be close to her father after the evening’s events. She also wanted to have the opportunity to speak to him alone on their way back.

Severus frowned as Virginie jumped in before he could refuse. “Let me transfigure your nightgown into something more suitable first.”

Hermione smiled gratefully at her mother. “Thank you, Mama.”

The three of them then slowly made their way to Remus’ rooms; Severus supporting Remus. On opening the door, they found Harry waiting for Remus.

“Dad, you’re covered in blood.” Harry was horror-struck at the stains that marred Remus’ clothing.

Remus cursed himself for not cleaning it off before returning. “A little accident.”

“What happened?” Harry knew that Remus had to have been attacked, but he couldn’t understand who would do such a thing in the school.

Remus brushed off Harry’s concerns. “It’s nothing to worry about right now.”

Severus decided to ask Harry about the nightmare Remus had mentioned straight away instead of waiting until the morning. “Harry, can you provide us with a copy of the last nightmare you had?”

Harry frowned. "But Dad said it was just a dream."

"We're not so sure now." Severus placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. "If you're not too tired, we'd like you to do this now; it might be important."

Harry nodded; he was happier with the dulled versions of his nightmares anyway. "Shall I get the pensieve?"

"Please." Remus sat down and winced. He knew that he'd feel worse tomorrow, if that was possible.

Hermione was interested to see if this pensieve was the same as her father's, and she watched attentively as Harry returned carefully carrying the pensieve that Flitwick had left in Remus' room. Harry set down the pensieve on the table and, thinking about the nightmare he'd had, pulled the memory out and placed it in the pensieve. Hermione gaped at the silvery stream that was being deposited in the bowl; she'd never seen anyone extract his memories before.

Remus stood wearily up and moved towards the pensieve with Severus. Harry stopped the two men. "Can I see?"

Remus shrugged, too exhausted to argue. "It's your memory."

Harry stepped forward and grabbed Hermione's hand. Together the four of them touched the liquid. Harry and Hermione had never been inside a pensieve before and they were fascinated by the three dimensional scenery. Harry remarked on it. "It reminds me of my visions."

"The only difference is that you can pause this." Severus informed him as the scene began to play out.

Harry turned away, as did Hermione, when one of the masked Death Eaters raised a knife and slashed the girl, who was tied down to the stone slab, across the throat. The same Death Eater then made a few further incisions before passing something across to another masked Death Eater, urging him to hurry. "Quickly, Amicus, we don't have much time."

“Don’t presume to tell me what to do, Lamia.” Amicus snapped back.

“You can look now.” Severus told the two children, after pulling Hermione’s hands away from her ears.

Hermione turned back to see the girl being dragged off the slab. Then the memory stopped and went fuzzy. “What happened?”

“Harry woke up.” Remus informed her. He turned to Severus. “Let’s go back slightly.”

Harry felt a little disorientated as the memory moved backwards. Harry walked closer to the Death Eaters who were now frozen in mid-action. Harry was disgusted to see that the female Death Eater had what looked like a heart in her hand. Harry avoided looking at the dead girl.

“What are they doing?” Harry asked.

“Resurrecting the Dark Lord.” Remus told him.

Harry’s legs suddenly felt wobbly. “He’s back?”

Remus nodded. “I’m afraid so.”

Harry sat down. “He did this to you, didn’t he?”

Remus pointed to the masked Death Eater who had the cauldron. “No, he did.”

Hermione walked up to the individual who had inflicted Remus’ wounds upon him. “Exactly who is he?” Hermione knew that he was Voldemort’s most faithful servant from what her father had said but she didn’t know who he really was.

“No-one knows his real identity but his given name is Amicus.” Severus spoke authoritatively.

“Isn’t Amicus Latin for friend?” Harry got up and walked closer to the male Death Eater trying to figure out who he could be.

“Five points to Ravenclaw.” Severus drawled and filled Harry in on what position Amicus held, as he hadn’t been there during the earlier discussion. “Amicus here is the Dark Lord’s confidante and a Lieutenant, and Lamia is also undoubtedly one of his Lieutenants. Their masks identify them as such.”

Remus nodded. “You’re correct. The mask defines what rank you hold.”

Severus didn’t think before asking his next question. “So your mask would have an embossed snake on it then?”

Shocked, Harry swung round on his father. “You’re one of his Lieutenants?”

Severus winced. He didn’t know that Remus hadn’t told Harry. “He is.”

Remus sighed. “Remember when I said that I’d been placed in a position where I could get access to Felidae’s cell after he was caught?”

“Felidae was caught by You-Know-Who?” Hermione was dismayed to hear that her former fiancé had been captured by the Dark Lord, and interrupted the conversation.

Harry answered her question. “He was a Death Eater, Hermione, not a prisoner. He betrayed You-Know-Who.”

Hermione sat down by Harry’s feet, feeling comforted to have him close to her. “I didn’t think the evening could get much worse after I found out about Professor Lupin and Papa.”

Remus turned to her. “I’m sorry; I shouldn’t have let you stay.”

"I'm glad you did. I'd rather know." Hermione hated the idea of not knowing what was going on. "How did Felidae betray You-Know-Who?"

"He got caught helping muggle prisoners to escape." Harry informed his friend. "I'm just lucky my Dad didn't get caught as well as he was helping him." Harry turned a betrayed face to Remus. "I still can't believe you became a Lieutenant, especially after everything you've told me."

Remus knelt down before Harry. "I didn't wish to, Harry. I was elevated into the position in order to provide the Dark Lord with a bodyguard after there had been several attacks on him. As a werewolf I'm better able to deal with spell damage than others and my hearing and eyesight made me invaluable."

"But why didn't you just let people attack him?" Harry ignored the frozen montage behind him and turned his full focus on Remus.

"Because I'd sworn to defend him with my life." Remus admitted.

"So really you're just like them?" Hiding his fear for his father in a display of abhorrence for what Remus had become, Harry sounded disgusted as he waved his hand towards the unmoving Death Eaters. "He calls and you go running."

Remus felt his heart sink at Harry's words. Wanting to hide his hurt, Remus pulled his mask out from beneath his cloak and put it on. "Exactly." Remus' voice sounded gruff as he tried to hold back his tears at Harry's obvious loathing for him.

Feeling more than a little scared by Remus' appearance, Hermione got up from the ground, and shrank back against Harry, who slid an arm around her. Harry too was also a little uncomfortable with the change in Remus' voice and demeanor. He would never have recognized him if he hadn't already known who he was. All he could see were Remus' eyes staring back out at him from behind the mask. "So how do you become a Lieutenant?" Harry almost barked out the question.

Remus felt too choked up to answer and Severus, quickly guessing what was wrong, answered instead. "Your Dad replaced Felidae when he betrayed the Dark Lord."

Hermione said nothing about Felidae. She was still reeling in shock about the fact that not only had her father almost become a Death Eater but that Professor Lupin had been one of Voldemort's highest ranking Death Eaters. Finding out that Felidae had also held that position was a little too much for her.

Harry felt Hermione sag slightly against him and he squeezed her waist to try and comfort her before releasing her to walk over to Amicus. "So he's the highest ranking Lieutenant." Harry talked to himself as he circulated around the masked man. "With Dad and Lamia that makes three Lieutenants." He ignored his Dad and turned to Severus. "Aren't there supposed to be four?"

Severus looked at Remus who just shrugged. "So far as I know there are actually seven. Four make up his personal entourage, of which your Dad is a part; two rank somewhat higher and finally there is Amicus who is at the top of the pile."

Harry was quiet as he absorbed the information. He then turned to Remus, his tone hard and unforgiving. "Can you please take that off? I think you've proved your point about what you are."

By now Remus had regained some control over his emotions, and he removed the mask. "If you ever come across any Death Eater who wears a silver mask like this one, don't attempt to fight them. Just get away if you can." Remus had tried to keep his voice steady to hide his response to Harry's harsh words, but grimaced as he realized how distant and cold he'd sounded when addressing Harry.

"What makes you think I'm going to come across them?" Harry asked incredulously. "It's not as if I'm going to go and look for them."

Remus' words shocked Harry. "I think you're the Boy Who Lived, not Jamie."

"But why?" Harry couldn't believe what he was hearing.

"This nightmare; I think somehow you're connected to the Dark Lord." Remus couldn't see any other reason for Harry to have had the nightmare. "Unless you're the Boy Who Lived, I don't see how you could have seen the start of his resurrection."

Harry's legs deserted him for the second time that night. "I half wish I'd stayed out of the pensieve." Hermione sank down beside Harry and put her arm around him.

Severus disagreed. "I think that it's best you know what you're up against." He left Harry sitting down and walked slowly around the Death Eaters. "It's a pity I can't just remove their masks."

"You couldn't even if this was real. Only the Dark Lord or the wearer can do so." Remus informed him. "It's insurance against our identities being revealed."

Hermione looked up. "Why hide your identities anyway?"

"What's more frightening than not knowing who's behind a mask. You could be facing your neighbor, friend or brother. You'd never know if the person you spilled your deepest secrets to was also your own worst nightmare." Remus knew that Voldemort wanted to keep his men on edge and most of the time it had worked.

Harry wrinkled his forehead. "But why those names?"

"I think the Dark Lord wanted to distinguish each of his favored by giving them a name that had some meaning to their position." Severus conjectured.

Remus hated his own bestowed name. "You're correct. In my case, however, I believe my name was meant to be denigrating rather than complimentary. Lamia's name whilst sounding demeaning isn't. In fact rumor has it that they were once lovers."

Both Hermione and Harry shuddered, with Harry giving a disgusted little "ugh" before asking another question. "What are you called?"

Remus pulled a face. "Praeses."

"So what does Praeses and Lamia mean?" Harry addressed himself to Severus.

Hermione answered him instead. "Guard and witch, I think."

Remus copied Severus' earlier award. "Five points to Slytherin. Lamia also means vampire, but to be honest I can't see the Dark Lord sleeping with one."

Hermione looked at the woman with interest. "Do you know who she really is?"

Remus shook his head. "Nobody does as far as I know. Amicus might but he's hardly going to tell me."

Harry's yawn interrupted them.

Severus put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "I think it's time you returned to bed. Take Hermione with you. I'm going to stay here for a while." He looked at Remus. "You should try and get some sleep as well."

Remus bid him goodnight and pulled the two children out of the pensieve. Walking to his cabinet, he pulled out two small tubes of Dreamless Sleep potion. "I want you both to take this."

Harry didn't need telling twice. After what he had just learnt, he just wanted to escape from reality for a time. Lying down on Remus' bed, he swallowed the contents of the tube and quickly slipped into a deep sleep. Hermione felt a little uncomfortable sitting next to Harry with a Death Eater standing over her.

"I won't hurt you, Hermione." Remus guessed what was troubling her. "You can trust me."

"How can I trust you when you didn't tell Harry about what you were?" Hermione held the vial in her hand.

"I didn't intentionally avoid telling him. It just got missed out of the discussion when we talked about my being a Death Eater." Remus knew how pathetic his excuse sounded.

Hermione snorted, despite her fear of her professor. "I don't believe you."

Remus sighed and sat down. "You're right. I didn't tell Harry because I was afraid of his reaction to me. We'd only just made up when he learnt the truth. I couldn't bear for him to turn away from me again, so when he didn't ask about how I'd gained access to Felidae's cell, I was glad and let it go."

Hermione slid up the bed a little. "But why did you put on your mask in the pensieve? I think it just made Harry feel worse."

"I was hurt at how Harry reacted. I couldn't bear for him to see me so I hid behind the mask." Remus admitted.

"Do you have any idea of how frightening you look when you put that thing on?" Hermione shuddered as she remembered how he'd looked.

"I'm sorry. It wasn't my intention to frighten you or Harry." Remus tentatively placed his hand on top of Hermione's.

Hermione forced herself to keep her hand still, even though all of her instincts were screaming at her to pull away. "What would happen if you came face to face with Harry when you were in your position as a Death Eater? Would you defend You-Know-Who or would you defend your son?"

Remus smiled bitterly. "My oath would mean that I would have to defend the Dark Lord, but I'd die before I let anything happen to Harry."

"So if you disobey your oath to defend the Dark Lord, it would kill you?" Hermione didn't give Remus any quarter.

"It would, and I'd choose to do it every time if it came down to him or Harry." Remus declared.

“What about someone else?” Hermione knew that once Voldemort’s re-emergence became public knowledge, Aurors would be called upon and would probably have to face the Dark Lord and his guards.

Remus knew Hermione wasn’t going to be happy with his response. “Then I’ll do whatever is necessary to maintain my cover. You heard Severus earlier. This is bigger than the both of us.”

“Would you kill me?” Hermione got to the crux of what was bothering her.

“No. It would destroy Harry and your parents; I couldn’t do that to them.” Remus reassured her. “Anyway, I think Harry would kill me before he’d let me hurt you.”

Hermione looked across to where Harry was sleeping. “Harry really cares about me that much?”

“I’m certain that he’d die for you.” Remus was fairly sure of his assertion.

Hermione was shocked and pleased. “I’d do the same for him.”

“You know I think you’re both too young for a serious relationship, don’t you?” Remus wanted to be clear on his opinion.

“Felidae told me as much.” Hermione looked Remus in the eye. “I do eventually want to get together with Harry in the future if he still feels the same about me. However, after talking to Felidae at Christmas, I’ve realized that I also need to concentrate on my schoolwork and myself. It was really difficult to focus when I was worrying about what I should do about Harry and a possible relationship.”

Remus couldn’t help but feel a little relieved. “And if he doesn’t feel the same?”

Hermione wondered how the conversation had managed to deviate from the discussion about Remus being a Death Eater to one about

her and Harry. "If he just wants to be my friend, then I'll settle for that."

Remus knew from experience that Hermione would want more despite her assertion, but didn't press the issue. "I think you should really get some sleep now." In response, Hermione looked apprehensively at the potion she was holding, making Remus frown. "Please take that."

Hermione shook her head. "I'd rather not."

Remus understood. "You can sleep here next to Harry if it makes you feel better. I'm sure Severus won't mind."

Hermione thought that her Dad would mind but said nothing and just passed the vial back to Remus. "Goodnight Professor."

Remus started to pull the door shut behind Hermione. "I know that finding out about me was a bit of a shock but please talk to Harry. Tell him he's got permission to tell you everything. Oh, and tell him to go to the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy and walk back and forth three times in front of it. If he thinks of the room he needs to talk to you in, it'll appear. You're both excused from lessons tomorrow."

Hermione slid back down the bed until she was fully stretched out and, despite her fears about Remus, was soon sleeping soundly.

Remus walked into the sitting room and transfigured the sofa into a bed. He thought it would be some time before he managed to get any sleep. However, within a few minutes, exhaustion overtook worry and he too fell to sleep. He didn't even hear Severus leaving the room a few hours later.

Harry groaned as he woke up. He was surprised to see Hermione asleep next to him until his memories of the previous night came rushing back. Before he could say anything, Remus put his head around the door and beckoned to Harry. Carefully sliding off the bed, Harry left the room and closed the door behind him.

Remus turned to face Harry. "I'm sorry for not telling you about my position. It was cowardly of me but I couldn't face losing you again. Instead I've made you fear me."

"I'm not frightened of you. I'm frightened for you. I hate the idea of what you've had to become." Harry admitted as he ran a hand through his hair, which had come undone from his hair tie, and was now flopping around his face. "Do you really have to defend him with your life?"

Remus decided to take a chance. "Harry, I'm not avoiding your question but I think you should talk to Hermione. I had a chat with her last night about this."

Harry smiled slightly at his Dad. "I will."

Remus went to hug Harry who backed off. "I just need a little time."

Remus understood and kept his distance. "I'll see if Hermione is awake." Hermione sat up just as Remus entered the room.

"So you're awake. Severus has said that Salty will bring you and Harry breakfast and whatever other meals you and Harry want. You can go to the room I told you about after you've both washed up. There's a set of clothing for you in the bathroom." Remus said in a soft, non-threatening tone; he wasn't quite sure how Hermione would be around him after the previous night's revelations.

"Thanks, Professor." Hermione darted into the bathroom which Remus pointed out to her.

Remus could see that despite their talk, Hermione was still rather nervous around him. He turned back to Harry. "Harry, answer anything Hermione wants to know about me. I'm going to sleep in this morning; Severus is taking my classes for me. I should be fine by lunch." Remus let out a sigh of relief as he lay down on the bed that Hermione had just vacated. While conjured beds were all well and good, they never seemed quite as comfortable as the real thing. "If you need me, don't hesitate to wake me up."

Harry thought his Dad looked awful and had no intention of waking him up unless the sky was falling in on him. "Okay. I'll see you later."

Harry watched his Dad fall asleep as he waited for Hermione. He had a feeling that Hermione wasn't going to feel quite so kindly towards his Dad now that she knew he was a Death Eater. He had to be honest with himself though. He too had mixed emotions about what his Dad had become but at the end of the day, he was still his Dad and he loved him, despite his repugnance for what he had been told. Harry knew that he would return to see Remus at the end of the day as he needed to tell him exactly how he felt.

Twenty minutes later the two children found themselves standing outside of the tapestry Remus had told Hermione about.

"Are you sure about this, Hermione?" Harry felt really silly walking back and forth.

"Of course." Hermione snapped; she was still feeling a little fraught after everything she had learnt.

"Oh my." Harry was surprised to see the door appear exactly as Hermione had told him it would. "I'm sorry; I just felt like an idiot doing that."

"Let's go in." Hermione couldn't wait to see what was behind the door. She was a little disappointed to find a table and four chairs. "It's not exactly anything special is it?"

Harry turned to her. "Well, I thought about wanting a room where I could sit down and talk to you; this is obviously it. We can sit down and we can talk."

Hermione shivered; the room wasn't particularly warm. "I wish this place had a comfortable sofa and a fireplace instead of the table and chairs."

Both children gasped as the room shimmered and a sofa replaced the table and chairs in front of a roaring fire. "What is this place?"

Salty's voice made the two of them jump. "Miss Hermione, it's the room of requirement. We call it the come and go room. You need something, it comes. You go, it goes."

Hermione's face split into a huge grin. "So if I wanted hundreds of books, they'd appear?"

Salty nodded. "Yes."

Harry shook his head as rows and rows of books suddenly appeared. "Hermione!"

"But think of the possibilities, Harry." Hermione could hardly contain herself.

"Breakfast, Miss Hermione." Salty waved his hand and a table laden with a wide range of various foods appeared in front of the sofa. "Salty be back later."

"Thanks, Salty." Harry's stomach rumbled at the sight of the food. "I didn't even realize I was this hungry."

The two children tucked in as the elf vanished. After they'd finished, Salty reappeared and removed the remains of the breakfast.

"So, what do you want to talk about?" Harry watched as Hermione pushed her hair nervously back from her face.

"Your Dad. He said that you've got his permission to tell me everything." Hermione chewed on her bottom lip, making Harry want to hug her and tell her that it was all going to be alright.

Harry proceeded to fill her in on everything he knew.

"So they tortured Pettigrew?" Hermione felt unsettled now that she knew the small man was innocent.

Harry nodded. "That's nothing; you should have seen what our look-alikes did to him."

Hermione shivered. "I'm not sure I want to."

"You don't have to. Anyway, the pensieve is in Dad's room." Harry wasn't surprised that Hermione didn't want to see what her counterpart was capable of.

Hermione then surprised herself with her next comment. "I don't want to see, but I think I need to."

Both children jumped when, with a small pop, Salty appeared holding the pensieve in question which he placed on the table before disappearing.

Harry looked at it. "I'm not quite sure exactly how this works." A book suddenly appeared on the table next to the pensieve.

Hermione picked it up. "'The Beginner's Guide to Pensieves' by M. Emerys'." She opened it up and read through the passages. "I think I've got it. We can stop and start the memories and jump through them just by thinking about what we want to do."

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Harry asked.

"I'm curious to see this other Hermione." Hermione admitted.

"I'm not sure you're exactly going to like her. We can watch some of the less gruesome ones first." Harry grabbed her hand as he spoke. "Let's touch the surface together."

Hermione watched as memory after memory played out. Eventually, she found herself standing in a room where she observed a bespectacled Harry with somewhat shorter hair, and an older version of herself, torturing Pettigrew. She stopped the memory before it finished. "I've seen enough. How can she be so callous?"

"I don't know. I feel the same about him." Harry nodded towards his counterpart. "They were both upset afterwards but I don't think I could have done it in the first place. Would you like to see the other dreams I've had?"

“Are they all as bad as this?” She wasn’t sure if she could stomach too much more in the way of torture scenes.

Harry pulled her out of the pensieve. “One isn’t particularly pleasant but the others aren’t too bad. I know Dad gave me dreamless sleep potion last night, but it didn’t work. I ended up dreaming about the other Harry.

Hermione could tell that Harry needed to discuss what happened with someone. “So these memories you want to show me are your dreams from last night?”

Harry nodded. “Yes, but last night was more like fractured scenes rather than whole dreams.”

“Let’s do it then.” Hermione watched as Harry used his wand to pull memory after memory out of his mind and placed them into the pensieve. The two of them then plunged back in.

Hermione found herself standing in a depressing cavernous kitchen. People were arguing about whether Harry should be admitted to something called ‘the Order of the Phoenix’. Hermione recognized Ginny and Ron Prewett, Sirius Black and herself amongst others. She watched as the argument raged as a woman both Harry and Hermione presumed to be Molly Prewett argued against letting Harry’s counterpart join something called the Order of the Phoenix. The memory suddenly stopped.

“What’s the Order of the Phoenix?” Hermione asked.

Harry shrugged. “I’ve got absolutely no idea. I’m more interested in knowing why I’d be dreaming about Ron Prewett’s mother. I have no idea what she even looks like so how can I dream about her?

“I don’t know.” Hermione felt odd standing in the misty pensieve. “Do you have some more dreams we can see?”

The mist wavered and Hermione found herself standing in a sitting room watching a very different looking Nia Lupin berating a young Harry who was in tears. She listened as the woman screamed at the

small boy telling him he should be grateful that she and Vernon had taken him in after her sister and her useless husband had died.

The memory ended and the mist wavered once more, and Hermione watched as a young Harry bought his wand from Mr. Ollivander.

The memory didn't last long and soon changed to one of a graveyard. To Hermione's left lay the body of a boy she recognized as Cedric Diggory. In front of her, stood a short individual who Hermione recognized from Harry's earlier vision as Peter Pettigrew. Hermione watched in dismay as Pettigrew cut off his own hand and dropped it into a cauldron while reciting a verse. She grabbed Harry's hand, as Pettigrew approached the other Harry who was bound to a headstone, and sliced open his arm, taking blood from it. The blood was poured into the cauldron which bubbled and hissed, until eventually a snake-like human arose from the cauldron. When Pettigrew addressed the newly risen figure, Hermione gasped and stopped the replay. "Let's get out of here."

Hermione was shaking so Harry pulled her onto the sofa. "Do you want a blanket?"

Hermione nodded and felt better as the room supplied a soft down blanket, which she gratefully wrapped around herself. "That was horrible. Why would you dream about You-Know-Who rising like that?"

"I don't know. I just can't figure out though why I'm having these nightmares." Harry leant back against the sofa.

Hermione sat quietly for a few minutes as she weighed up what she had seen. "I don't think you're having nightmares, Harry. I think they're actually memories. I think this other Harry is essentially you."

Harry thought she was wrong. "How can that be? He's obviously older than me."

Hermione hoped Harry wouldn't laugh at her. "This is going to sound silly but I think he's travelled through time or from another universe."

"I don't see how." Harry had never heard of any such thing. "Timeturners only go back twenty-four hours, and I've never read of anything to do with dimensional travel."

"I don't know how either but I think we need to speak to Papa." Hermione had finally stopped shivering. "There was something else about the other Harry. Did you see the scar on his forehead?"

Harry nodded. "I just thought I'd dreamt it there. I mean it's exactly in the same place as where Jamie's scar is."

"The other Harry has the same wand as you." Hermione had spotted it in the first nightmare Harry had shown her. "Do you think that means anything?"

Harry shook his head. "I doubt it. I wasn't even sure if that dream was one of my nightmares. I mean I bought my wand from Mr. Ollivander the same as I did in my dream; the only difference is that in real life my Dad was there when I got it."

"We definitely need to speak to someone about this." Hermione wanted her father but knew he would be busy covering Remus' and his own classes that day. Not being able to pursue her theory any further at that time, she changed the subject. "Harry, did your Dad tell you about our talk last night?"

Harry nodded. "He said to ask you about his having to defend You-Know-Who."

"He said that he'd die to defend you instead of You-Know-Who if it came down to a choice." Hermione squeezed Harry's arm comfortingly. "He also said that he'd do the same for me." Hermione swallowed hard. "He told me that it would destroy you if I died."

Harry felt himself redden. "He's right. You mean more to me than any of my other friends."

"I feel the same about you as well." Hermione had hoped for more, and to cover her disappointment, she changed the subject once more.

“I think I’m going to wish for some books. Do you want to do some reading?”

Harry realized that he’d hurt Hermione somehow and took her hand. “Hermione, have I upset you?”

Hermione lied. “I’m just tired. It’s been a bit of a stressful time.”

Harry knew that she wasn’t going to open up to him and wished for a book. “Let’s do some reading then.” In response, Hermione wished for books on the first war against Voldemort. However, after a few minutes of reading, Harry watched as Hermione’s eyelashes began to flutter; moments later she was sound asleep. Harry picked up the book on becoming animagus and settled down to read until lunch.

5th February 1994

Harry looked across as Professor Flitwick came into the room. “How did you know we were here?”

Flitwick smiled. “My parents told me.”

Harry’s question as to who Flitwick’s parents were, were answered when a middle-aged couple stepped into the room and the woman rushed over to Flitwick. “Leo, sweetheart.”

Harry and Hermione both gawked as Flitwick shimmered and changed into a tall blond haired man. “Hello, Mum.”

Hermione nudged Harry. “He’s the man who dealt with annulling my engagement to Felidae.”

“What, no hug for your favorite son?” Felidae’s voice came from behind the couple.

Peri swung round. “Hush now. You’re both my favorite sons.”

Harry and Hermione were both now feeling confused. Nicolas saw their confused looks and moved over to them. Holding out his hand he introduced himself. “You must be Harry. I’m Nicolas Flamel. You

look a lot like Remus did when Leo revealed he was Professor Flitwick; he couldn't believe his eyes either."

Harry was glad he wasn't the only one who had been shocked at the discovery. "Pleased to meet you, Mr. Flamel." Harry then pulled Hermione forward. "This is Hermione Snape."

"Ah yes, the young woman who was momentarily engaged to Dae." Nic shook her hand. "Pleased to meet you, my dear."

Hermione was almost speechless at meeting Nicolas Flamel and just about managed to spit out a hello.

"Please both call me Nic." Nicolas smiled at the children. "This lovely lady is my wife, Peri. And you've already met Leo and Dae."

Dae grinned at Harry and Hermione. "It's a little confusing isn't it?"

Harry nodded. "Can you explain please?"

Dae sat down. "Mum and Dad adopted both me and Leo after we become disillusioned with our own families."

"But why is Leo pretending to be Professor Flitwick?" Harry asked.

Leo looked at his Dad who nodded. "In the Ministry I'm part of an undercover team who is trying to bring Dumbledore to justice for crimes we believe he committed during the muggle Second World War. Unfortunately we don't have any solid proof yet but we're working on it."

"Where's the real Flitwick?" Harry thought it was all really exciting, and wondered whether Leo was an Unspeakable. He also wondered what it was that Dumbledore had done that had been so bad.

"I can't tell you that; just that he's safe." Leo told him. "I actually work with your mother at the Ministry."

Harry was surprised. "You mean Maman?" He knew Lily was good at charms but he couldn't see her being an Unspeakable.

Leo smiled a little as he thought of Lily. "Yes, she started in my department last year."

Harry looked at Dae. "And you also work for the Ministry?"

Dae nodded. "Guilty as charged."

Hermione already knew this and asked about his parents. "So do Nic and Peri work for them too?"

Nic confirmed Hermione's question. "We do. Peri's our head archivist."

Harry felt a little overwhelmed and was happy when Severus and Remus walked into the room.

Remus placed the pensieve with Harry's memories on the table that had appeared on his entrance. "Shall we get down to business?"

Everyone except for Harry and Hermione stood up and moved across to the table where Remus had placed the pensieve. Severus addressed the two children. "This may take some time. Please remain here until we return."

The two children watched as the adults all touched the pensieve and froze. Two hours later, the adults emerged.

"Sorry we took so long but we wanted to check a few things more than once before coming out." Peri smiled apologetically at Harry.

"So do you know what's wrong me?" Harry asked a little nervously.

"Harry, I don't think anything is wrong with you. On the contrary I think something has gone wrong with the timeline." Nic informed the surprised looking young man sitting in front of him. "It appears that Hermione was correct with her supposition that your nightmares are actually repressed memories, and that the other Harry has indeed travelled through time."

Hermione looked pleased that she'd been right.

"But he can't have." Harry didn't want to believe what he was being told.

"Peri has some ideas on how things might have come to be." Nic patted Peri on the knee.

Harry looked expectantly at Peri who smiled. "I also agree with Hermione's theory, but I need to check on a few things before I confirm it." She turned to Leo. "Do you mind if I use your pensieve?"

Leo shook his head. "Go ahead; there's still plenty of room in there."

Peri thought steadily as she withdrew memory after memory and placed them into the pensieve. "Excuse me for a while."

Everyone watched as the woman touched the bowl and immediately froze like a statue. Almost an hour later, she emerged to find everyone eating the snacks that French had somehow known to bring, despite not being told where Felidae had been going to.

"I think I may have the answer." She told the assembled group. "I found a runic spell which allows a traveler to move through time."

"So this other Harry has definitely travelled through time then?" Hermione swallowed a chocolate dipped strawberry she'd stolen from the pile that French had provided especially for Harry. Harry grinned and fed Hermione a second strawberry, making her color, and the adults, except for Remus and Severus, smile.

"Sort of. I don't think the other Harry has bodily traveled through time though." Peri told her.

Harry felt totally confused. "But how can he have travelled back then?"

"If I understood the ancient language of the runic spell correctly, the spell destroys a caster's body, leaving his soul and memories intact

to move through time to a specified point.” Peri sounded as if she was lecturing to her students.

Hermione was fascinated. “What happens when his soul and memories arrive at the selected point in time?”

“They merge with the younger version of themselves.” Peri informed her. “As you might be aware, two people can only exist in the same space together for little more than twenty-eight hours, which is the reason why timeturners don’t go back any further than twenty-four hours as a safety check.” Peri paused to take a sip of the glass of white wine that had appeared at her elbow. “Because two people can’t materially exist in the same space after twenty-eight hours, the runic spell destroys the body but leaves the soul and memories of the caster intact as they don’t appear to be affected by the laws of time travel.”

Harry tried to make sense of what he was hearing. “You mean to say that the other me I saw, used this spell to go further back than a timeturner would allow, and because of this, his body died but his soul and memories merged with my own?”

“That’s what should have happened. However, for some reason I’m not aware of, I don’t think you were able to cope with the influx of memories and your brain isolated them.” Peri still wasn’t totally sure of why this had happened. “I believe the other Harry’s memories were too much for you to handle, and your brain detached them from your own to save your sanity.”

“What happened to the other Harry’s soul?” Harry hated the thought of someone else being part of him. “Please don’t tell me he’s part of me.”

“I’m afraid that is exactly what he is. I think his soul merged with your own to create one person.” Peri sympathized.

“When do you think this merger happened?” Hermione asked.

“I don’t know. Harry should eventually be able to find out. From the release of memories, it appears as if his brain is now slowly allowing

them to trickle out, almost as if it feels he can cope with their emergence.” Peri theorized.

Remus, who had been quiet up to this point, joined the conversation. “Harry would have been quite small. He’s been having nightmares like this since I married Nia. Lily would know if he’d had them before then, and she hasn’t said anything about it.”

Nic cut in on the conversation. “In that case, I think we can safely assume that the merger took place on the night Voldemort attacked the Potters or thereabouts.”

Harry didn’t quite know what to think. “Why do you think the other me did it?”

Hermione had an answer. “Perhaps the war with You-Know-Who wasn’t going well. He could have been desperate. If he arrived when You-Know-Who was attacking your parents, perhaps he was trying to stop it from happening.”

Peri was impressed with Hermione’s intelligence. “I agree with you again. Something must have gone wrong with the spell, or perhaps they hadn’t known that Harry’s counterpart’s body would have been destroyed.”

“What would have happened if the spell had gone completely wrong?” Harry had stopped eating and was focusing his full attention on the conversation.

“Then the caster would simply have died.” Peri had been able to deduce that much from the writings. “It’s not a spell I would have wanted to try unless I’d been backed into a corner I really couldn’t escape from.”

“Why not?” Remus enquired. “If the caster was willing to sacrifice himself, then I don’t see a problem.”

“It’s not because of the spell’s failure, but because of its success. If I read the spell correctly, the backlash would have wiped out everything with a few miles. Imagine if you’d done the spell in a large

city; thousands would have perished.” Peri watched Harry whiten. “What’s wrong?”

“I’ve had dreams of placing runic inscriptions in a circle around me, but I never connected them with my nightmares. I just thought I was dreaming about my schoolwork. In these dreams I can’t see them but I know there are other people in the room with me.” Harry’s voice sounded a little shaky. “What if these dreams aren’t just dreams and I was actually reliving the other Harry doing the spell? What if he’d done the spell and killed as many people as you said?”

“Then everyone in the room with him, together with all those within the blast zone, would have died.” Peri moved to enfold Harry in a hug which he gratefully returned. “Harry, you can’t know if these are just dreams or not until you fully regain your memories.” She let Harry go. “There’s something else.”

No-one said anything, so Peri continued. “This spell doesn’t only take the caster back in time but it also sends out ripples from the point where the caster arrives.”

Hermione easily grasped what Peri was saying. “So you mean to say that if Harry’s double did really travel through time, then he not only changed future events, but past ones as well?”

Peri nodded. “I think so. I don’t have any idea though of exactly how far back or forward the ripples extended.”

Harry knew that he alone held the ability to discover what happened. “Is there any way I can find out what happened without having to wait for these memories to emerge gradually?”

Leo spoke up. “I have a way of breaking through forgotten memories but it is dangerous and extremely painful.”

“What do you mean by dangerous?” Remus asked.

“Harry could lose a lot of memories in addition to those he’s trying to access, if it doesn’t work out.” Leo explained.

Remus shook his head. "There's no way you're going to subject Harry to that. I think we should try Legilimency instead."

"But my mind is protected; Professor Snape said so." Harry reassured his Dad.

"I'm not so sure any more." Severus interrupted. "If Madam Flamel's theory is right, I believe that the barriers between your memories and those of your counterpart are breaking down. I think that it was your mind trying to protect you from those memories that stopped me from gaining entrance through Legilimency previously. If you remember, I had no trouble accessing your mind in the cavern."

"Can we try it now?" Harry wanted to get to the bottom of things and as quickly as possible.

Remus looked at Severus who nodded. "It's probably a good idea. We need to try and see if Harry's mind is still safe, especially after everything we've discussed tonight."

Harry sat back and watched as Remus pulled out his wand. "Relax Harry. Trust me; I won't hurt you." Remus knew that Harry had been unsettled by his discovery a few days earlier, even though things between them were now back on a relatively even keel.

Harry smiled encouragingly at Remus. "I know, Dad."

Remus shut out the rest of the room and focused solely on Harry. "Legilimens."

Remus easily entered Harry's mind and found himself in a shadowy version of the graveyard memory which he had seen in the pensieve earlier. Eventually, however, he accessed a new memory and found himself watching Harry and Hermione kissing beside a lake. Pulling out of this memory, Remus moved into another. He felt a little uncomfortable to come across a memory of the alternate Harry and Hermione in bed together. Not wanting to embarrass Harry, he quickly withdrew. "I can access both Harry's memories as well as those of his counterpart."

Harry smiled gratefully at his Dad for not telling everyone what he'd just seen. "So what does it all mean?"

"To be honest, we don't know." Peri answered him. "I think you need to access a few more memories before we can definitively explain what is happening or whether we can use your counterpart's memories to any advantage."

"Speaking of advantages, I'm almost certain that the other Harry is the Boy Who Lived in his timeline. He has the same scar that Jamie Potter has." Nic had watched the graveyard memory four times trying to take in everything that was happening. "Once Harry regains his memories, we may be able to use them to give us an upper hand in the fight against Voldemort, now that he has returned."

Remus agreed with Nic. "I believe you're right about the Boy Who Lived theory. It would certainly explain why the Dark Lord wanted the other Harry's blood for his resurrection as we saw in the memory. But the Dark Lord looks totally different in Harry's memory from what he looks like now. What we learn from the alternate timeline may have no bearing on this one."

Harry recalled his nightmare about the Dark Lord's return. "So if things are so different here, then why do you think I'm connected to You-Know-Who? I'm not the Boy Who Lived here, Jamie is."

"I think it might have something to do with the joining of your souls." Severus conjectured.

"That doesn't make me the Boy Who Lived as well though does it?" Harry felt comforted as he felt Hermione squeeze his hand tighter than she already was doing.

"I don't honestly know Harry." Severus informed him. "No-one's ever survived a killing curse before so we have no idea how you've been affected by this joining. Your merger with the other Harry's soul certainly explains why you have the Snape heir mark."

This came as news to Remus. "Harry has the Snape heir mark?"

Harry pulled back his hair and showed his Dad. "Professor Snape made sure that no link remains though apart from the symbol."

Remus knew that Harry's crush on Hermione had probably had a lot to do with his desire to make sure that he wasn't in any way connected to Severus. "I can understand that."

Harry blushed and returned to the subject of the alternate Harry. "In my most recent memories of the other Harry, why was Mum being so mean to him?"

"I don't think she's the same person we know, Harry." Remus put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "In fact everyone seems to be different there."

Harry had more questions. "So why are the people so different in the alternate timeline? Why would they be different from the people we know now?"

"I think it's the effect from the ripples going back in time. People in the alternate timeline didn't turn out the same as they would have here, as events would have played out differently in that timeline than they have in our own. We need to discover when the other Harry merged with you for definite. It might give us some idea how far back the distortion extends." Peri explained.

Harry was worried. "Do we have to change everything back when we do?"

Peri shook her head. "We might end up making things worse if we were to attempt to do that. We can't do anything except let this timeline run its course."

Harry let out a sigh of relief. "I'm glad. I don't think I want the other Harry's life."

"Don't worry. Nothing's going to happen to change your life." Remus pulled Harry up from the sofa and hugged him before gently moving him so that he could look into his face. "Harry, whatever you do, you must not look Dumbledore directly in the eye. After the ease with

which I entered your mind tonight, I believe that Dumbledore may now be able to access your memories if he tries.”

Harry didn't know that Dumbledore had no intention of all at trying to access his mind after his previous attempt, and was therefore concerned. “But what if I accidentally meet his gaze?”

Felidae looked at Leo, who reached into his pocket and threw a ring across to Harry who slipped it on. “Harry, if you wear this ring, it'll protect your mind from attack unless it is a fully fledged assault.”

Leo then pulled out a necklace. “Hermione, this is for you. It will do the same as Harry's ring.”

Severus watched gratefully as Hermione slipped the necklace around her neck. “Thanks, Leo. I wasn't very happy about her having to take the potion so often.”

Leo shrugged off Severus' thanks. “It's not a problem, Severus. The potions you've been supplying us with have more than made up for it. Besides, I would have done it anyway; I wouldn't want any child exposed to Dumbledore's meddling.”

Hermione smiled gratefully. “Thanks Mr. Simultas.” Harry was surprised; he hadn't known that Leo had a different last name from Felidae.

“You can both call me Leo.” Leo smiled at them. “Just remember to call me Professor Flitwick in school.”

Hermione yawned and Peri looked at the time. “Goodness, it's almost midnight.”

Remus stood up. “I think I'd better be getting Harry and Hermione back to my rooms. I'll be back shortly.”

The two children moved to join Remus. “Goodnight everyone.”

Everyone bid them goodnight as they disappeared out of the door.

Ten minutes later Remus arrived back. "Dumbledore has just returned from whatever errand you sent him on."

Leo frowned at his father. "I thought he was supposed to be gone until tomorrow."

"He was. Obviously something has happened to bring him back early. No matter, he can't get in here at the moment anyway." Nic was annoyed that Dumbledore appeared to have gotten out of his meeting with the French Ambassador for schools which had been scheduled for the next morning.

"Speaking of Dumbledore, I've got something I need to ask Severus and Leo." Remus turned to the two men in question. "Dae and I are part of a group sworn to bring justice to those betrayed by Dumbledore. In view of your dislike of him, Severus, and your activities, Leo, I wondered if you would both like to join."

"I might." Severus could tell that Remus hadn't finished yet.

"There's just one snag. Sirius Black is part of the group; in fact we usually meet at his house." Remus knew that Severus wasn't going to like that part.

Severus declined outright. "I refuse to join anything that he's part of." He knew he was being a little childish but his hatred of Black couldn't be pushed aside even for something as important as Dumbledore's downfall.

Leo sided with Severus. "I also have no wish to join. I have enough to do as it is without further complications. Dae has already asked once and I've refused."

"Fair enough." Remus had hoped to get them on side but he wasn't surprised by their refusal.

"I have an idea." Peri took over the conversation. "Why don't we form our own group? The group you are currently part of can keep their focus on Dumbledore, and we'll handle Harry and Voldemort."

Remus mulled it over, and decided it would be a good idea. "Do we just keep this to ourselves or do we bring others in?"

Nic couldn't risk blowing years of hard work. "Obviously we can fill Harry and Hermione in on what is happening. However, no-one else must know of our involvement. As Unspeakables we have access to more information than the Minister himself. I don't particularly want that kind of information leaking out. I trust everyone in this room implicitly but have no wish to expand that trust any further."

Severus wasn't surprised to learn that the Flamel family were all Unspeakables. It was rumored that entire families were usually drafted into the department; it made keeping secrets that much easier. "I presume that Remus is already aware of your status but why include me?"

"Because Leo and Dae have both agreed to stand surety for you. They trust you implicitly but you can't reveal this information to anyone else, not even your wife." Nic told him.

"You're the head of the Unspeakables aren't you?" Severus hazarded a guess.

"I am, and as such I'm Dae and Leo's superior. Leo heads a department of his own but his main focus is trying to bring Dumbledore in with something substantial. The same goes for Dae, except he is tracking Death Eaters. Leo is Dae's superior." Nic informed Severus.

Leo stuck out his tongue at Dae, who flipped him the finger in response. "Don't forget little brother, I hired you and I can fire you."

"Yeah, right." Dae smirked.

Both men shut up when their mother slapped both of them up the back of the head. "We're trying to have a serious discussion here, boys. Now behave."

Severus had to hide his smirk at the chastened look on the two men's faces. "So it's you who has been receiving the benefits of any potions that I've made for Dumbledore?"

Nic nodded. "It is. I've been masquerading as Dumbledore's friend for years trying to find a chink in his armor but so far I've been totally unsuccessful."

Severus decided to ask for Nic's aid. "Speaking of potions, I may have need of your help, Mr. Flamel."

Nic had already anticipated Severus' request. "Leo has already filled me in on Voldemort's return, and what he has requested Remus to do. And Severus, please do call me Nic."

"Some of the ingredients necessary for the Vivificus potion are nigh on impossible to obtain." Severus started to explain only for Nic to hold up his hand to stop him.

"I have everything you need in my lab at home. Perhaps you'd care to accompany me back now?" Nic offered.

Severus bent his head. "I'd appreciate that."

The group left the room and went their separate ways.

Up in Remus' rooms, Harry lay on the large bed in his father's room looking at Hermione. "I can't believe your parents let you sleep here again."

"Nor me." Hermione admitted. "I think your father has something to do with it."

"You're probably right." Harry munched on the chocolate digestive he'd picked up from the plate that Salty had brought them.

"Do you think your father is worried I might tell someone about him?" Hermione was still a little afraid of Remus.

Harry wasn't really worried about such a thing. "And would you?"

“How could I? He helped my mother escape from You-Know-Who. If anything I owe him a debt.” Hermione took a large swallow of the creamy hot chocolate Salty had also brought. “Anyway, Papa isn’t in a much better position.”

“I know.” Harry was just happy he could now share everything that was going on with Hermione. He smiled at her and thought how pretty she looked in her plaid pajamas. “I’m glad that things are back to normal between us. I hated it when everything felt strained.”

Hermione put down her mug and hugged Harry. “I’m glad too.”

Harry hugged her back briefly before letting her go. “I think I’m going to go to sleep.”

Hermione realized she’d embarrassed Harry by hugging him. “Me too. I want to go back to the room of requirement tomorrow and look up some more things.”

Harry groaned. “Only you.”

Hermione hit him over the head with her pillow before rolling over and closing her eyes. “Goodnight, Harry.”

“Goodnight, Hermione.” Harry lay in the dim light and kept watch until he knew she’d gone to sleep. Only then did he lean over and kiss her cheek, before rolling over himself and closing his eyes.

Next chapter: Harry receives a letter and gets a shock; Neville stands up for someone; Harry learns how to deal with Dementors; we discover what Dumbledore has been up to; Hermione finally discovers her animagus form; Peter seeks out help elsewhere.

Chapter 37: Surprise!

5th February 1994

Albus Dumbledore headed back to his office. He'd been glad when the French minister's wife had been taken ill. It had meant that he'd been able to get back to Hogwarts earlier than expected. He called out to one of the portraits as he entered his office. "Frances, has anything unusual happened since I've been gone?"

Frances Montgomery stared coolly down at Albus with her green eyes. "There's something been going on in the Room of Requirement. The house elves haven't been able to get in."

Albus frowned. "Do you know who's been using it?"

"Professors Lupin and Snape." Frances told him. She didn't tell him about anyone else. As a portrait she owed her fealty to Dumbledore but she disliked the corrupt headmaster, and would do anything she could to thwart him in his efforts. She also knew that if she had said no, Dumbledore would more than likely have asked a different portrait and she didn't want that to happen. She watched as Dumbledore threw floo power into the fireplace and called out Remus' name.

After a few minutes, Remus appeared. "Is something wrong, Headmaster? It's rather late and I was just getting ready to go to bed."

"This won't take long. Can you please step through?" Albus asked politely.

Remus cleared his mind before complying. As he stepped in Dumbledore's office, he was surprised to see a portrait of a woman wink at him.

"I believe you were using the Room of Requirement today." Albus watched Remus' face for his reaction.

Remus now knew why the woman had been winking at him. "That's correct. Severus and I were using it to try and work on a new formula for Wolfsbane."

"Why not use Severus' lab? It should have had everything you needed." Albus pointed out.

"It doesn't have some of the rarer materials we required, and it was simply easier to use the room's conjured up versions rather than trying to obtain the real thing." Remus lied easily.

Albus felt the tension leave his body. "That's fine. It's just that the house-elves were having a problem accessing the room."

"We locked it due to the volatility of some of the ingredients we were using." Remus knew that he'd have to warn the others that the room was being watched.

"Thank you. That will be all." Albus watched as Remus departed from his office. He wondered if he should summon Severus but after checking the time, decided against it. He looked back up at Frances. "Has anyone else been using the room?"

Frances shook her head and blatantly lied. "No, Headmaster."

"I think it's time that Professor Lupin had a change of portrait in his rooms. Please let Sir Folger know that he is no longer needed in the Professor's rooms and that you will be taking his place." Albus ordered.

Frances hid her contempt for the headmaster as she nodded before disappearing.

When he got back to his rooms Remus was surprised to see the green-eyed portrait waiting for him. "Hello."

"Hello, Professor Lupin. I wanted to let you know that Dumbledore is probably going to place a guard on the Room of Requirement but that you shouldn't worry about it too much." Frances informed him. "I can

deal with whomever he chooses to guard the room, if you ever need to use it again.”

“My name is Remus, and why would you warn me?” Remus had never known a portrait that had deliberately disobeyed the Headmaster before and was quite suspicious of the portrait’s motives.

“I’ll explain in a moment. I know you probably don’t trust me.” Frances began, only for Remus to agree with her. “But I swear that my allegiance is to your son Harry.”

Remus watched amazed as the portrait seemed to expand for a few moments before glowing silver and resuming its original size. “What was that?”

“A portrait can choose whom they wish to pledge their allegiance to. I’ve chosen to pledge mine to Harry. As a former headmistress, I still owe Dumbledore fealty but for some things my allegiance overrides that.” Frances explained. “My name is Frances Montgomery. Your son, Harry, is actually one of my descendants through his mother’s side. I know Lily Evans is supposed to be a muggleborn but she’s actually descended from a line of squibs. My children were all born squibs and, as far as I know, so were all of their descendants until Lily came along. I don’t know how or why she managed to avoid this fate but I’m glad she did.”

Remus frowned. “So Nia’s a squib?”

“Who’s Nia?” Frances hadn’t heard of her before.

“Lily’s sister.” Remus clarified.

“Oh, Petunia.” Frances didn’t hold with the use of shortened versions of names. “Yes, I believe she is a squib. After so many squibs in the family I’m surprised that all of her children turned out to be magical.”

Remus was intrigued. “So if your descendants were all squibs, how did you find out about them?”

Frances smiled. "My sister's children were all magical. They, and their children, have kept me abreast of what is happening in the world, and provided me with up-to-date knowledge about my descendants."

"So Harry and the other children have relatives they don't know about?" Remus sat down as he waited for Frances to respond.

"They do, but after all these years they are very distant relatives. Sadly only one attends Hogwarts now." Frances sighed. "I haven't yet had a chance to speak to her alone."

"Who is she?" Remus wondered who the children's distant relative could be.

"Katherine De Montfort. In fact I believe she is a good friend of your daughter Aurilia. I was extremely pleased to see that one of my descendants made Slytherin." Frances looked proud. "I too was in Slytherin."

"Now why that doesn't come as a surprise?" Remus grinned cheekily at the portrait, who laughed.

"I like you Remus." Frances looked amused. "I should tell you that Dumbledore has asked me to take over Sir Folger's spot in your rooms."

"I think I'd like that." Remus had a feeling that Frances would be an extremely interesting portrait to talk to.

"Good; I think I'm going to enjoy your company." Frances smirked. "I will, of course, have to tell Dumbledore a few things about what you are doing, but don't worry. I'll be very selective."

Remus yawned. "I'm sorry, Frances, but I need to let the others know that there might be a problem with using the Room of Requirement."

Frances shook her head. "Don't worry about that for the moment. Your friends have all left the room and gone their separate ways; I checked before coming here. So go and get some sleep and I will see you in the morning." Frances closed her eyes.

“Goodnight Frances.” Remus walked into his bedroom and shut the door.

February 14th 1994

Draco spotted his mother’s owl, Gilligan, making its way towards him. Absently feeding the owl a piece of bacon from his plate, Draco pulled off the letter that was attached to its leg and ripped it open.

“Oh Merlin.” Draco gasped as he read the note.

Harry swiveled to face Draco. “What’s wrong?”

“It’s Mum.” Draco was pale.

“What’s happened?” Luna, who was sitting on the other side of Draco, put her arm around him.

“She’s pregnant.” Draco blurted out.

Luna dropped her arm and burst out laughing. “Draco, for a minute there I thought you’d had bad news.”

“It is bad news. What if the baby ends up being like Matthias?” Draco closed his eyes, missing the glare that Pansy sent his way. “Oh Merlin, I feel sick.”

“It’s a bit early to worry about that just yet, Draco.” Harry stole Draco’s last piece of bacon. “It’s only going to be a tiny thing. You’ll love being its big brother.”

“Just think, it could turn out like me.” George slapped Draco on the back.

Draco just moaned in answer.

Harry laughed. “You’ll get over it.”

“You wouldn’t be laughing if you got news like that.” Draco pointed out.

Harry just grinned. “Ha! That’s unlikely to happen to me.”

Luna frowned at Harry. “I’d be careful if I was you, Harry. You never know what might happen.”

Harry pulled a face at her. “I think I do. Mum and Dad are divorced. They’re hardly likely to be telling me that I’ve another brother or sister on the way.”

Luna just smiled secretively and went back to her breakfast.

Harry shook his head at Luna and looked across to the Slytherin table. The white rose he’d sent Hermione was now propped up against her goblet, as she engaged in conversation with Daphne, who’d obviously been sent a bouquet of red roses from Fred. Harry could only just make out Daphne’s face above the mass of long-stemmed flowers. Harry hoped that Hermione didn’t feel too let down in comparison.

Over at the Slytherin table, Hermione was pleased with the single rose that Harry had sent her. Her friend, however, thought differently. “He only sent you one rose? That’s it?”

Hermione picked up the rose and inhaled its delicate aroma. “We’re just friends, Daphne, unlike you and Fred.”

Daphne’s face broke into a grin. “They’re wonderful aren’t they?”

Hermione knew that she wouldn’t have wanted anything so ostentatious but politely agreed with her friend. “They’re very lovely.”

Daphne beamed but then her smile slipped away. “What about Felidae? Didn’t he send you anything?”

Hermione had received something that morning. “Of course he did; a yellow tea rose bush was waiting for me in my parents’ rooms.” Hermione didn’t tell Daphne that things between her and Dae had actually been quite strained since she had found out about his

background, and the rose bush had been more of a conciliatory gesture than anything else.

Daphne was satisfied with Hermione's answer. "Good. I'd hate to think he was slacking off already."

Hermione wished she could tell Daphne about her annulment. "I'd hate it too."

Hermione then maneuvered the conversation back to Fred, taking Daphne's mind off both Harry and Felidae.

Fable House

Nia yawned as she made her way to the kitchen. She had made the most of Scarlett staying at Lily's house to lie in. As she pushed open the kitchen door, she spotted a beautiful pot filled with white violets. Picking up the note propped up against the flowers, Nia opened it.

'For a special lady. I'd be honored if you'd join me for dinner at seven. Grim x'

As seven o'clock got nearer, Nia became more and more anxious. She didn't know why; she and Grim were just good friends. A crack signaled Grim's arrival. She was shocked when he walked into the kitchen. "You're wearing a muggle suit."

"So I am." Grim responded. "Are you ready to go to dinner?"

Nia picked up her coat and bag. "Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise." Grim winked. "If you'd like to take my arm."

Nia looked nervous. "We're apparating?"

Grim knew she didn't like wizard transportation, and had always refused point blank to use apparition before, preferring to floo if she had to use any form of wizarding transportation at all. "We need to. I'd hate for you to get your dress dirty. I promise it won't hurt. Just take a deep breath and close your eyes."

Nia shakily placed her hand on Grim's proffered arm. "I'm ready."

"Just trust me." Grim squeezed her hand and thought about where they were going.

Nia gasped as she opened her eyes. "But how did you know?"

"A little birdie told me." Grim smiled at her.

Nia couldn't believe it. As a small child her parents had taken her to York on a day trip, where Nia had fallen in love with the city. She had returned several times on her own since then. "Where are we eating?"

In answer, Grim led her up to a restaurant Nia had never been in before. "It comes highly recommended. We can have cocktails on the top floor and then we're booked to eat at seven thirty."

Nia settled for a glass of white wine before dinner. After they'd finished their meal, Grim turned to Nia. "Would you like to take a stroll?"

Despite the time of year, the weather was fairly clement and Nia was excited to be in one of her favorite childhood haunts. "I'd love to."

The two of them walked quietly through the streets until Grim came to a hotel. "I've booked us into a suite for tonight. I've arranged for us to take the train to Edinburgh tomorrow, and we can floo back home from there."

Nia didn't quite know what to say. "That's very kind but..."

Grim knew what was bothering her. "The suite has two bedrooms."

Nia blushed. "I'm sorry."

"Come on." Grim took Nia's hand and led her inside.

Nia was surprised at the opulence of the sitting room they were led into. "It's lovely, Grim."

Grim walked over to the wet bar where a bottle of pink champagne sat on ice. "Would you like a glass?"

Nia nodded. "Thank you." After drinking some of the champagne, she sat down. "I don't mean to be rude but why are you doing this?"

Grim cleared his throat. "I think a great deal of you, Nia, you know that."

Nia reached across and squeezed Grim's hand. "I do of you too."

"Nia, I want to marry you." Grim told her.

Nia was shocked. "But I'm, but I'm..."

"A very special person who I've fallen in love with." Grim reached into his pocket and pulled out a small black velvet roll. "I didn't even realize it until Lupin came round on New Year's Eve and told me that you and the children were in danger from Pettigrew. It was then that I knew that I wanted to marry you. Nia, I want to take care of you for the rest of your life."

Nia stared in amazement as Grim got down on one knee. As he unfolded the velvet roll, Nia was shocked to see that it contained the most incredible pink diamond ring. "It's beautiful." Several tears fell down Nia's cheeks.

Seeing Nia's tears, Grim was worried that she would say no. "I understand if you think it's too soon."

Nia shook her head. "It's not that. It's just that no-one has never done anything like this for me before."

Grim knew that Nia's marriage to Lupin had been one of convenience for the sake of Harry and Dudley but he didn't know much about her first marriage. "Didn't Dudley's father propose to you?"

“Not exactly. We just sort of fell into it. Both of our parents more or less presumed we’d get married and before we knew what we were doing, we were married and Dudley was on the way.” Nia smiled apologetically. “To be truthful, I don’t really think that my failed marriages are exactly a good topic at this moment.”

Grim nodded understandingly. “You might be right.”

Nia took a deep breath and held out her left hand. “Grim, I’d be delighted to become your wife.”

Grim slid the ring onto Nia’s finger, watching as it resized itself to fit her, before gently kissing her on the cheek. “I’ll make you happy, Nia.”

Clearing his throat, Grim got to his feet and grabbed the bottle of champagne. “More champagne?”

Shaking slightly, Nia nodded. “Thank you, yes.”

After topping up Nia’s glass, Grim sat down next to her. “Nia, I want to do this properly. If you want a large wedding, then a large wedding we’ll have. If you don’t, then we won’t.”

Nia felt herself fill up again. “I don’t know what to say.”

“You’ve said the most important thing, and that’s yes.” Grim knew that he would have to send Lily and Luna something nice for their suggestions. Luna had been ecstatic when he’d told her that he was going to ask Nia to marry him, and had suggested doing it on Valentine’s Day. When he’d nervously approached Lily, she’d told him about Nia’s favorite haunt and had laughed off his worries about it being too soon after Nia’s divorce. Lily was well aware of how Nia felt about the bear-like man, even if Nia hadn’t wanted to admit it to herself.

Feeling a little overwhelmed, Nia stood up. “I think I’m going to retire to bed.” She wondered if Grim expected to share the room with her.

She needn't have worried. Grim stood up and kissed her hand. "Goodnight Nia. Your nightclothes should be in the left-hand bedroom and there's an en-suite bathroom off your room."

Nia headed into the bedroom Grim had indicated and closed the door, before leaning back against it. She looked down at the beautiful ring that now adorned her left hand and smiled. She hadn't known that she was in love with Grim until she'd seen his panicked look when he thought it had been too soon. Humming softly to herself she made her way into the bathroom.

19th February 1994

Harry looked up as the post arrived. He spotted Hedwig flying to his Dad who removed what looked like one letter of many. She came next to him and rubbed her head against his hand, making him smile. He took his letter from her, fed her a little bacon and watched as she flew to Dudley, then Aurilia and finally to Georgiana. Remembering Luna's warning of a few days earlier, Harry felt a little apprehensive as he ripped open his letter. After reading its contents, he got up and walked out of the room.

Hermione watched Aurilia open the letter that Hedwig had delivered, only for a small frown to grace the girl's face. "Is everything alright, Auri?"

"Mum's getting married again." Auri briskly informed her. "Will you excuse me?"

Auri got up and followed her brother out of the Great Hall. Over on the Gryffindor table, Hermione could see Georgiana happily passing her letter over to Seville to look at. Obviously Georgiana didn't have a problem with Nia's news. Hermione left the table and went in search of Harry.

Remus finished reading his letter before getting up and walking over to his son. "Dudley, can I have a word?"

Dudley followed his Dad into the teacher's side room, looking a little resigned.

Remus shut the door before addressing Dudley again. "You already knew didn't you?"

Dudley nodded his head. "Luna told me when we came back to school that Uncle Grim was going to ask Mum to marry him."

"Don't you think it might have been nice to give the rest of the family a heads up on what was going on?" Remus had been more than a little taken aback to get his letter.

"I promised Luna I wouldn't tell anyone what she was going to tell me. I didn't know she was going to tell me about Mum and Uncle Grim." Dudley defended his actions. "You've always lectured us about keeping promises."

Dudley was right, he had. "And I'm glad you remembered that. I'm sorry. It was just a bit of a surprise I hadn't expected." Remus knew that he had been wrong to try and blame his son. "I need to go and find Harry and Auri. I don't think either of them took the news too well, if their hasty departures from the Hall were anything to go by."

Just as Remus was turning to leave, Dudley put out a hand to stop him. "Are you alright, Dad?"

Remus had been a little surprised by the speed that Lovegood had proposed but it hadn't really been a big shock to him. "I'm fine, Dudley. I had a feeling your Mum and Grimstock would eventually get together."

Placated, Dudley left the room and returned to where Luna was waiting for him. Remus left the room by the back entrance and went in search of Harry.

Harry stormed up the corridor, not really looking where he was going. The next thing he knew, he found himself on the floor after cannoning into his muggle studies teacher. Harry looked up, tears in his eyes. "I'm sorry, Professor."

Anna easily pulled Harry to his feet. "That's quite alright Harry. Can I help you with something?"

Harry shook his head and promptly burst into tears. Anna put her arm around him. "Come on, let's go to my rooms where you can tell me what's bothering you."

Harry let Anna lead him off and soon the two of them were seated in her rooms. "So, Harry. Would you like to tell me what's wrong?"

Harry passed her the letter. He didn't know why but he felt he could trust the Professor. Anna skimmed over its contents, barely holding in a gasp at the news contained. "Nia is getting married again?"

Harry's head shot up. "You know my Mum?"

Anna could have kicked herself. "Remus has mentioned her before."

Harry couldn't hide his dismay. "She's only just gotten divorced from Dad. I can't believe she'd do this."

Anna took Harry's hand. "Harry, your Mum has probably been lonely. I know she and Remus only got divorced at the end of last year but their marriage had been over for a while, hadn't it?" Rumors about the divorce had flown around the staff room whenever Remus hadn't been there, but had eventually died down.

Harry pulled his hand away and, getting up, walked over to the window. As he did so, he spotted a pair of silver and glass unicorns set back on Anna's cupboard. Ignoring Anna's plea to come back and sit down, Harry walked over to the cupboard and picked one of the unicorns up, turning it over in his hand. "Where did you get these, Professor?"

Anna closed her eyes before answering. "I think you know exactly where I got them, don't you Harry?"

Harry nodded stiffly. "They were a birthday gift from me and Dudley weren't they?" Harry put the unicorn down before angrily confronting his former nanny. "How could you have just disappeared like that?"

Mum called the police when we couldn't find any trace of you. Do you have any idea what she went through?"

"Sit down, Harry." Anna patted the sofa next to her.

Harry ignored Anna's gesture. "You lied to us. We thought you were a muggle, and you were really a witch."

"And you were also a wizard masquerading as a muggle." Anna defended herself. "You could say that your family also lied to me."

"I suppose." Harry knew that she had a point. "You spent all those years living like a muggle. Why?"

Anna looked lost in her thoughts for a moment before finally answering. "My father's pretty well off and I was able to do muggle charitable work for him. But I finally decided that it was time to stand on my own two feet. That's why I took the job with your Mum. I only intended to stay for a year but I fell in love with all of you and ended up staying longer than I should have."

"So why did you leave?" Harry kept his distance.

"It was time to move on." Anna knew she couldn't tell Harry the truth.

"I wish you'd stayed." Harry had missed his former nanny. "I don't understand why you came on holiday with us and then just disappeared."

"I did something I wasn't proud of." Anna's voice was barely a whisper. "My father arranged for me to get away. When this position at Hogwarts came up, I jumped at the chance. I never expected to see you and Dudley here."

"Why didn't you tell me who you were when I first started here, or that day in class when you thought I was upset by your eye coloring?" Harry demanded.

Anna ignored his questions. "Why did you recoil during that first lesson, if it wasn't because of my eye color? I don't believe it's because you felt unwell, despite what you told me then."

"Because I saw the bite on your neck. Combined with your eye color, it threw me for a moment and..." Harry's voice trailed off as he suddenly realized something. "Your bite. Where did you say you got it from?"

Anna tried to keep her voice calm. "I told you, a neighbor's cat did it."

Harry shook his head. "I don't believe you. You've been marked by a werewolf, haven't you?"

Anna tried to hide her shock that Harry had worked it out. "What makes you think that?"

"Because I recently did a little research on werewolves." Harry had done the research after Remus had told him about marking *Felidae* as one of his pack. Like any other Ravenclaw, and Hermione, he'd hated that there had been a gap in his education.

"And what did you find out?" Anna tried to sound casual as she responded.

Harry recited almost verbatim from the book he had read. "That in their human form, werewolves use a bite predominantly for two things, apart from killing; to mark a member of their pack, and sexually as a mark of possession. I also found out that on the cusp of the full moon, just as the werewolf surfaces, the werewolf uses a bite to mark the one person they consider to be their mate for life."

"Ten points to Ravenclaw." Anna was impressed, notwithstanding the situation. "Did you find out anything else?"

As Harry had used the Room of Requirement for his information, it had provided him with information that he was quite sure his Dad wouldn't have wanted him to have seen. "I did, but I'd rather not discuss that."

Watching Harry redden, Anna guessed that the other information Harry had found was sexual in nature, so she let the subject drop. "I quite agree."

"Professor, the thing that you weren't proud of. What was it?" Harry hoped it wasn't what he thought it was.

"It doesn't matter now; it's just something I'd rather forget about." Anna wasn't about to tell Harry about her and Remus.

Harry felt queasy, particularly as Anna was avoiding his question. "It wasn't sleeping with a werewolf by any chance was it?"

"It's none of your business what it was." Anna didn't meet Harry's eyes as she answered.

"So it was." Harry still clung to the hope that it hadn't been his Dad. "Did he mark you in human form or as he was turning?"

Anna gently touched her neck. "Human."

"Was it my Dad?" Harry asked quietly.

"No." Anna lied.

Harry watched as a blush crept up Anna's neck and flooded her face. "I think you're lying."

Anna stared down at her hands, as her usual capableness seemed to flee in the face of Harry's accusation. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"I think you do." Harry sneered. "How could you do that to my Mum? She was supposed to be your friend. Some friend you turned out to be."

Anna hid her hurt at Harry's words. "As your Professor, I think you owe me a little respect."

“But this isn’t about your being my professor. This is about your sleeping with my Dad.” Harry snapped at her. “I never expected you to find out that you were just another one of Dad’s women.”

“Women?” Anna hoped that Harry was just trying to hurt her.

Harry smiled almost triumphantly. “He didn’t tell you, did he? Dad’s wasn’t faithful to Mum during his entire marriage. He’s slept with more women than he can probably remember.”

Anna felt faint. “But...”

As he watched Anna’s hands start to shake, Harry felt a small shaft of guilt which he ignored. “Don’t tell me you thought he loved you?”

Anna tried to hide her tears as Harry’s barb hit home. “It’s none of your business, what I thought.”

Harry could see that Anna was trying hard not to cry. “You really did think that, didn’t you?”

Anna felt her façade begin to crumble at Harry’s words. “He marked me. What was I supposed to think?”

A knock at the door startled the two of them. Anna wiped her eyes and opened the door to reveal Remus. One of the third years had told him that Harry had gone off with Professor Jameson, so Remus had decided to try Anna’s rooms to see if they were there.

From the tear tracks on Anna’s face, Remus knew that there was something more happening than just Harry being upset over his mother’s letter. “Can I come in?”

Anna stepped aside, allowing Remus into the room, where he immediately headed towards Harry, who looked very upset. “Harry, what’s wrong?”

Harry backed away. “Don’t touch me.”

Remus swung on Anna. “What’s going on?”

Anna pulled down the collar on her blouse, making Remus gasp. "Johanna?" He turned to look at Harry and knew that Harry had found out about them. "Damn."

"I'd say that that just about covers it." Anna sat down, her legs shaking precariously.

Harry turned angrily on his Dad. "Something else you forgot to tell me about, wasn't it? That you'd screwed my nanny. Anyone else you missed telling me about?"

Remus growled low in his throat. "Watch your mouth, Harry."

Upset, Harry ignored Remus' warning. "Why should I? You slept with her when Mum was in the hospital."

Remus looked incredulously at Anna. "You told him when it was?"

"Of course not." Anna retorted. "He spotted the mark the morning after you gave it to me."

Harry glared at Remus. "You should have told me."

"And what exactly did you expect me to say? I told you I'd been unfaithful to your mother; I didn't have to tell you with whom. That was my business alone." Remus was starting to get irritated with Harry's attitude. "I've been brutally honest with you over the last few months but you can't expect me to tell you everything."

Deep down, Harry knew Remus was right, and that Remus couldn't tell him everything but he still wished Remus had been the one tell him about Johanna rather than finding out like this. "But you and her..."

Anna stood up and put a hand on Harry's arm, which he roughly shook off. "Harry, it was just the once, and we both know it was a mistake."

Remus backed her up. "Anna's right. It was a mistake; one I'm sure we'd both rather forget about."

"I'll bet it is. I expect poor Mum would like to forget about all of your mistakes as well." Harry just wanted to lash out at someone; his anger at his Mum's wedding news and his discovery about Remus' sleeping with Johanna was too much. "You can both go to hell; I'm sure you'll find plenty to do there together."

Harry turned to leave only for Remus to move swiftly across the room and grab his arm, spinning him around to face him. Harry looked up into his Dad's face and gulped. Remus' eyes were vivid amber, and Harry realized that he had pushed him too far.

Remus walked Harry backwards until he was leaning up against the door. "Harry Remus Lupin, you will apologize to Anna right now, and then you will go to my rooms and wait for me. Do you understand?" Remus' voice came out as a low, almost vicious growl as he fought to control his temper.

Harry stalked furiously over to Johanna. "I'm sorry, Professor."

Anna didn't think that Harry was sorry at all, but didn't labor the point. "Apology accepted."

Harry didn't look at Remus as he left the room before angrily making his way towards his Dad's rooms.

Remus shut the door and, with Harry gone, directed his unabated fury towards Anna. "You were here all this time and you didn't figure that I might like to know?"

"It was none of your business. So we slept together. Big deal." Anna stood her ground, even though she quaking inside. "It's not as if you really cared about me anyway."

Remus could smell Anna's fear as he stepped closer to her. "What makes you think that I didn't care?"

“The fact that you’ve never been faithful during the entirety of your marriage to Nia.” Anna wished Remus would back off.

Remus knew then that Harry had told her about his serial infidelity. “That doesn’t mean to say I didn’t care about you. Hell, I even had a detective trying to find you.”

“My father never told me that.” Anna was a little surprised that Mack had kept the information from her.

“Why would he?” Remus was a little confused as to what Anna’s father had to do with anything.

“I told him about us after the Christmas you were in the hospital; he just said that he’d deal with it and arranged for me to disappear.” Anna admitted. “Why did you come looking for me?”

Remus answered honestly. “After seeing you when you picked up the children to take them to Florida, I knew that I still wanted you.”

“But you don’t any more do you?” Anna already knew the answer to her question and held up her hand. “Don’t answer that. Look Remus, I left in the first place because I couldn’t deal with being in the same room as you.”

Remus had surmised as much. “I can understand that but why did you wait until after the Christmas vacation to disappear; why not do it after you first left?”

Anna swallowed hard. “Because at first I thought that putting some space between me and you would be enough. But after seeing Nia that Christmas and realizing how she felt about you, I couldn’t forgive myself for what I’d done to her. I also knew that if you’d asked me, I would have done it again. So after I returned from the vacation with the children, I decided to run and hide.”

Remus felt his temper beginning to abate at Anna’s confession. He was still curious about her father though. “So you got your father to set things up for you. Exactly who is your father? As you never

seemed to want to discuss them, I presumed that you were estranged from your parents.”

“I wasn’t estranged from them. Life was just easier if I didn’t discuss them.” Anna wondered if she could avoid telling Remus who her father really was.

Remus recognized evasion when he heard it. “And your father is?”

“Mack Jameson.” Anna cringed as she watched the penny drop.

“But he’s a billionaire.” Remus knew all about Jameson. He was famous in both the muggle and wizard worlds. Despite being a pureblood, he owned multi-million pound muggle companies as well as some major magical companies including Charisma. “Why the hell were you working in the first place?”

“I needed some independence. I’d been working for charities which were linked with my father up until I started working for you and Nia.” Anna filled Remus in on what she had already told Harry. “I only intended for it to be short term but people have a way of getting under your skin.”

“I know what you mean.” Remus grinned ruefully at her. “It’s hard to believe that I ever thought you were a muggle.”

Anna shrugged. “It’s not as if you saw a lot of me until you took the job that brought you closer to home.”

“You didn’t attend Hogwarts did you?” Being a year younger than Anna, Remus was sure he would have remembered her. “At least I don’t remember you.”

Anna shook her head. “I didn’t want anything to do with the world that had killed my mother. I’d always been curious about muggles and made up my mind that I wanted to live like one. My father, of course, refused to let me attend a muggle school and hired both wizard and muggle tutors for me. He knew that my mother’s death wouldn’t always affect me so badly.”

Remus asked next about Anna's mother. "What happened to your mother?"

"She was killed by Death Eaters." Anna could still remember the day her father had come home and told her at her mother had been murdered. "It made headline news. You might remember."

Remus frowned. "What was her first name? I might remember then."

"She actually went by Selena Gregory as she refused to take my father's name." Anna's mother had been independent and wild, refusing to follow tradition.

Remus was shocked. He hadn't connected Selena Gregory with Anna. Her death had made headline news for its barbarity; something that, at ten years of age, had stuck in his mind. Also, she was infamous amongst the Death Eaters as being Voldemort's first lover; something he couldn't tell Anna. "I'm sorry that you had to lose your mother at such an early age."

"It was a long time ago, Remus." Anna changed the subject. "I can't believe I tried everything to escape from the wizarding world and ended up looking after a wizarding family masquerading as muggles."

"Nia's actually a squib." Remus surprised Anna. "Everyone else is magical though, including Nia's sister, Lily."

Anna had been astounded to read about Harry being Lily Black's son. "It came as a bit of a shock to find out that Harry was actually born a Potter. I don't think he particularly looks like James Potter or Lily Black for that matter, except for his green eyes."

"Actually, when he wears his hair short and puts on glasses, he looks a lot like James Potter. However, with his long hair and contacts lenses unless you knew who his birth father was, you'd never guess he was a Potter." Remus himself had been surprised at the resemblance when Harry had had his hair cut short.

“And I certainly wouldn’t have guessed that Jamie Potter was his twin.” Anna began to relax as she and Remus moved onto a more neutral topic.

“What do you think of Jamie?” Remus didn’t really like the boy but had held off saying anything to any of the other teachers, except Minerva and Leo, because most of them thought that Jamie could do no wrong purely because of something he did as an infant. He hadn’t bothered asking Severus as the potions master thought that most of the students were idiots anyway.

Anna answered honestly. “Professionally, I think he could do better but slacks off because of who he is. Personally, I don’t like him.”

“I’m glad it’s not just me being biased.” Remus smiled crookedly at her.

Anna felt her stomach flip over at the sight. Since she’d started at Hogwarts, she’d done her best to avoid Remus and she’d missed seeing him smile at her like that. “It’s not, believe me. If he did half as well as Harry, he’d be a good student.”

A silence fell between the two of them, as both were lost in their thoughts. Remus was the first to speak again. “So, how do you want to play things between us now? Do we go back to being casual colleagues or do we try and start to build a new relationship as friends?”

Anna mulled it over for a moment before answering. “I think I’d like to try and be friends. It’s not as if I’m pining over you anymore. I’m actually engaged to be married.”

Remus raised an eyebrow. “Muggle or wizard?”

“Muggle. His name is Mark Jacobs and he works for my father. We’ve been dating for just over a year now.” Anna pulled a chain from around her neck which held her engagement ring. “I don’t wear it because I have no wish to answer questions about my private life.”

“Does he know what you are?” Remus knew that some muggles found it difficult to deal with being married to a magical person.

“He does and he’s fine with it.” Anna didn’t tell Remus that Mark had walked out when she first told him, and hadn’t returned for almost two weeks.

“I’m pleased for you.” Remus tilted his head. “So does he know what you really look like? In fact, do I know what you really look like?”

“My hair is colored reddy-brown using muggle dye. It’s normally the natural blonde it was when I worked for you. My nose looks different because I had a muggle nose job. I didn’t particularly like my nose anyway and it was an easy way of changing it permanently.” Anna grinned. “To be honest, I didn’t have to change that much. I didn’t really need to; it was enough to fool you as my evading detection up until now proves.”

Remus frowned. She was right. She hadn’t changed much, just enough to hide who she really had been. “Why change at all? You obviously didn’t know I was a wizard.”

“I didn’t want to be walking around muggle London and bump into you.” Anna started to tell Remus, only for him to gently run a finger down her nose. “Please don’t Remus.”

Remus pulled back his hand. “You were in love with me, weren’t you?”

“At the time, yes, I was.” Anna admitted. “Which is why I couldn’t risk running into you. I was afraid of what I would do. I even went as far as hiding my scent.”

Remus grimaced. “You knew I was a werewolf?”

Anna nodded. “I should have realized it when you were able to hold me immobile on the night you marked me. With my inherited werewolf abilities, most men would have been unable to do so.” She knew that Remus and the rest of the staff had been filled in on her background after she had started teaching at Hogwarts. “It was only a few days

after you'd bitten me that I made the connection about what you were."

"And you weren't afraid?" Remus was well aware of how most wizards viewed werewolves.

"To be honest, a little." Anna disclosed. "However, in all those years I'd worked your family, you'd never harmed me or anyone else as far as I knew. Having a werewolf for an ancestor also helped."

Remus was curious. "How did you manage to hide your scent?"

"A potion. My father has plenty of potions masters. He got them to make it for me." Anna told him. "At least I can stop taking it now; the taste of it is absolutely foul."

"I expect your father wasn't too happy when he found out that I was joining the teaching staff." Remus correctly suspected.

"That's an understatement. I had to beg him to let it go." Mack had been furious and had threatened to have Remus removed permanently. "When Christmas came, and you hadn't bothered me, he finally stopped ranting."

"Will he object to our becoming friends again?" Remus had a feeling he already knew the answer to the question.

"Probably, but if I don't tell him, he won't know." Anna shrugged. "Anyway, it will be nice to have a friend to call my own. I get along well enough with the heads of house except for Pomona, but everyone else pretty much avoids me."

Remus knew why. "That's because they think you're a half-blood who teaches muggle studies. Despite the fact that a large percentage of half-bloods and muggleborns attend here, some of the teachers are still prejudiced against them."

Anna was disgusted. "But that's ridiculous. Some of the brightest students are muggleborns or half-bloods; look at Harry and Justin Finch-Fletchley."

"I feel the same way but as a werewolf, I can do little to sway their ideals." Remus put his hand on the door knob. "Speaking of Harry, I think I've left him stewing for long enough now. I really need to go and deal with him."

"Remus, don't be too hard on him. He was really upset about Nia getting remarried. Finding out about us must have been really unpleasant for him." Anna still felt the need to protect Harry, despite his appalling behavior of earlier.

"I understand that, but he's got to learn that he can't just run off at the mouth without thinking." Remus pulled open the door. "Perhaps we can get together and talk again once things with Harry have settled down."

"I'd like that." Anna felt a small pang as she watched Remus leave. In spite of her engagement to her fiancé, she had badly wanted to react when Remus had touched her face.

Remus set off for his rooms thinking about Anna. He'd been amazed that she'd managed to avoid discovery for so long. Reaching his door, he pushed her out of his mind; he needed to focus fully on his son.

Harry jumped up nervously from the sofa as Remus walked in. Once his anger had abated, he'd become worried about what Remus would do. It had taken some doing to stay sitting in the room, when all he had really wanted to do was run and hide. He knew, however, that his punishment would have ended up being a lot worse if he had. "I'm sorry, Dad. I shouldn't have been so rude to you and Johanna."

"No, you shouldn't have." Remus could see that Harry had been crying. "Harry, I can't just let this go."

Harry hung his head. "I understand."

"I'm stopping your animagus lessons." Remus knew this punishment would bother Harry more than anything else he could have imposed on him.

“But...” Harry’s voice faltered as Remus looked fiercely at him. “Yes, Sir.”

“Harry, sit down.” Remus’ voice became gentle as he took a seat next to Harry. “I know finding out about your Mum getting remarried must have been a terrible shock for you.”

“I don’t want her to get remarried.” Harry admitted. “I thought that they were just friends.”

“Our marriage has been over for some time. I’m glad she’s going to be taken care of. I think Lovegood will be good for her.” Remus could see that Harry still didn’t agree.

Harry said nothing.

“Harry, about Anna...” Remus began.

Harry interrupted. “I hate her. She pretended to be Mum’s friend while she was sleeping with you.”

“It wasn’t her fault; I took advantage of her.” Remus tried to shield Anna from most of Harry’s anger.

“She could have said no.” Harry persisted. “I’m dropping muggle studies.”

“I’m afraid I can’t let you do that.” Remus wasn’t about to let Harry’s academics suffer for something he had done. “You will continue your muggle studies class until the end of fifth year, after which time you can decide if you want to drop it.”

Harry pouted. “I’m not going into the same classroom as her.”

“You expect me to treat you like an adult and tell you everything that is going on, don’t you?” Remus asked.

Harry could see where Remus was going with his question and was powerless to do anything except agree. “I do but I still don’t want to have anything to do with her.”

"I'm sorry you feel that way but the matter is non-negotiable." Remus wasn't going to back down on the issue. "As an adult, all I'm asking you to do is to be polite in her classes and do your schoolwork. I'm not asking you to take tea with her. You don't have to like her to get by in her classes."

Harry knew that he'd be continuing with muggle studies whether he wanted to or not. "Yes, Sir." Harry decided that he needed to put some distance between him and his Dad. "Can I go now, please?"

Remus nodded. "If you see Aurilia send her to me."

"Okay." Harry pulled open the door and headed out of the room.

Remus sat back against the sofa. Finding out that Anna Jameson was in fact Johanna had come as something of a surprise. He was finding it difficult to reconcile the capable and slightly stern muggle studies teacher with the pretty, vivacious blonde he'd slept with. Worse, he knew that he was still very much attracted to her. Deciding he needed a drink, Remus looked at the time and groaned; it was only ten in the morning. Thinking to hell with it, Remus poured himself a large scotch, only to be denied his escape, by the sound of his daughter's voice at the door.

23rd February 1994

Hearing Anna scream, Remus watched with his heart in his mouth as he spotted Harry plummeting towards the ground. He quickly turned his attention from fighting the Dementors that had poured onto the pitch to saving his son. Casting cushioning charm after cushioning charm, Remus hoped that it would be enough.

Harry woke up in the infirmary to find Hermione sitting next to him. "What happened?"

"You fell off your broom when Dementors invaded the pitch." Hermione felt sick as she thought about the sheer numbers that had suddenly appeared.

“But I thought they were supposed to stay outside the grounds.” Harry tried to sit up and failed.

“Don’t move; you hurt your back when you fell.” Hermione put a hand on Harry’s shoulder to prevent him from rising. “You must have been overcome by the Dementors. The first we realized that you weren’t safely out of the way was when I heard Professor Jameson scream. Your father was nearly overcome by Dementors trying to save you from smashing into the ground.”

“Dad nearly died?” Things between Harry and Remus were still somewhat strained.

Hermione looked grim. “He did. If it hadn’t been for Dudley protecting him, then he probably would have. Dudley couldn’t cast the Patronus Charm so...”

“What’s the Patronus Charm?” Harry knew he had heard of it, but he couldn’t remember what it did.

“It’s used to drive away Dementors; it’s the only way you can stop them.” Hermione had already asked Remus about it. “It’s notoriously difficult to cast.”

“How many teachers were able to cast the charm?” Harry wondered if all the teachers had been capable.

“Only a few; Professor McGonagall, Professor Jameson, Papa and your father. In fact it was Professor Jameson who kept the Dementors away from you as you lay on the ground; she saved your life.” Hermione had watched from a distance as Dementor after Dementor had backed off from the determined professor.

Harry shut his eyes for a moment. He’d been so rude to Anna, yet she’d obviously risked her life to save him in spite of his behavior. “Thanks for telling me.”

“I thought you might like to know.” Hermione was aware of who Anna really was as Harry had told her.

“So if only four teachers used the Patronus Charm, how did Dudley manage then?” Harry couldn’t see how Dudley could have helped without using the charm.

“He used his beater’s bat instead and smashed out at the Dementors that were attacking your Dad. It bought Papa enough time to help your father and Dudley.” Hermione had felt helpless as she had watched her father deal with the Dementors that had started to surround Remus and Dudley.

“Did anyone get hurt?” Harry felt awful that Dudley and his Dad might have died because of him.

Hermione’s face fell. “Dennis Creevey from Gryffindor, and one of Auri’s friends, Katherine De Montfort. The Dementors got hold of them. There was nothing anyone could do to save them.”

“Where’s Auri now?” Harry was concerned about his sister.

“She’s staying with your father, along with Astoria Greengrass. Papa gave them permission to do so as they were both really upset about Katherine.” Hermione knew that normally her father would have taken care of the girls but because Auri’s Dad was a teacher, and Astoria hadn’t wanted to be parted from her friend, he’d let Remus take care of them. Daphne had been almost hysterical at nearly losing her sister and it had taken the combined efforts of Fred and Hermione to get her to calm down. She was now sleeping in their room after being given Dreamless Sleep potion.

“I wish I could have done something.” Harry hated feeling so powerless. “But no, I’m the idiot who passes out and everyone has to risk their own lives to save me.”

Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand. “It’s not your fault that the Dementors affect you that way, Harry.”

Harry wished he could remember the Dementors coming onto the pitch but the whole memory was just a blur. “I need to learn how to do the Patronus Charm. I can’t keep on passing out.”

“What’s the last thing you remember?” Hermione asked.

“I was just reaching for the snitch when I started to shiver. I felt as if I’d fallen into a bucket of ice. ” Harry shuddered as he remembered what he’d heard just before he fainted. “Before I fell off my broom, I could hear a man laughing at someone who was screaming, and that was the last thing I can remember.”

“Do you know who was screaming?” Hermione guessed it must have something to do with the other Harry.

“I’ve no idea.” Frustrated, Harry slapped the bed. “If I knew the Patronus Charm, I might have been able to do something.”

“But you didn’t even know that there were Dementors on the pitch to be able to cast the charm.” Hermione pointed out.

“I know that, but I felt the same coldness as when I was affected by the Dementor on the Hogwarts Express. I think the cold is a good indicator of a Dementor’s presence. If I can at least use the Patronus Charm, I might stand a chance of being able to overcome the Dementor’s effect.” Harry argued.

“I know what the Charm does and how to cast it theoretically, but I don’t think I can do it.” Hermione didn’t quite meet Harry’s eyes.

“You tried it didn’t you?” Harry knew Hermione too well.

Hermione nodded. “Nothing happened. I focused on a happy thought which was needed to cast it. Your father told me about it when he came and kept me company for a while.” Hermione had grilled Remus on the spell. “Your father said that I can only produce a patronus if my memory was extremely happy.”

“What’s a patronus?” Harry had no idea what one was.

“It’s a silvery representation of your positive thoughts. Your father showed me the wand movement and told me the recitation for the spell, but I still didn’t manage to produce my own.” Hermione had been fascinated by the silvery animal that had run around the ward

before nudging Remus' hand and disappearing. She'd been too frightened to pay too much attention when the teachers had been battling the Dementors. "Your Dad's patronus is a coyote which is known for its cunning, being a shapeshifter, its use of light and dark magic, and its creativity."

Harry grinned. "Don't tell me, you looked it up?"

"Your Dad wouldn't tell me what it symbolized, so I when I took a break I dropped by the library." Hermione indicated the pile of books that lay on the table next to Harry's bed. "It certainly suits him."

"So what's the incantation for the charm?" Harry was determined to master the charm despite Hermione's failure.

"You have to incant 'Expecto Patronum' while focusing on your strongest happy memory." Hermione had picked the day that her baby brother had been born.

"I wonder what Dad thought of." Harry wondered if should ask him before remembering that he wasn't really speaking to him.

Hermione blushed. "I actually asked him. He said it was far too personal and that some people will reveal what their thought is and some won't."

"I don't think I'd better ask him then." Harry scratched the idea of asking his Dad. "What did you think about?"

"The day Dominic was born." Hermione frowned. "Obviously I need something more powerful. Any ideas on what memory you would use?"

"Meeting Maman for the first time." Harry lied; he already knew that he'd be using the first time he'd kissed Hermione in the swimming pool.

"That's a good idea." Hermione then fell silent as she pondered what memory she could use instead of her original one.

Harry interrupted her musing with a question about the Dementors. "So why do you think the Dementors invaded the pitch in the first place?"

Hermione looked around the room before casting a privacy spell. "Papa thinks the Dark Lord has taken control over them again, and that the Ministry is powerless to do anything about it."

Harry knew that Dementors were supposed to be Ministry controlled. "Haven't the Ministry worked out that something is wrong?"

Hermione shook her head. "Papa said that the Minister and Dumbledore had a lengthy meeting, after which the Minister said the invasion had something to do with the excitement of the crowd inciting the Dementors to attack."

Harry was about to respond to Hermione when they both heard the door opening. Hermione hurriedly dropped the privacy spell as Neville, Georgie and Seville walked in. Georgie broke away from her friends and rushed to hug her brother. "Harry, I thought you were going to die." Harry could see she was trying not to cry.

Harry put a hand on Georgie's face. "I'm going to be just fine. It takes more than a fall to kill me off."

Georgie smiled waterily. "Did Hermione tell you about Auri's friend and Dennis?"

Harry stroked Georgie's hair away from her eyes. "She did and I'm sorry to hear about them."

"It could have been Auri or Astoria, and not Katherine." Georgie was still trying hard not to cry. "A Dementor had all three of them backed in a corner. It picked out Katherine."

Harry went white. He hadn't realized how close his own sister had come to not making it. "I'm sorry for Katherine but I'm glad it wasn't Auri."

Georgie nodded. "I feel so horrible being glad but I can't help it."

"It's perfectly normal to feel like that." Hermione moved around the bed to enfold the girl in her arms. "Let it out."

Georgie gave a small howl and collapsed into Hermione's embrace. She had seen the Dementor approaching the three girls and had been about to dart over to try and do something when Neville had grabbed her, dragging her away while she had struggled against him wanting to go to her sister.

"Georgie tried to reach the girls but Nev stopped her." Seville knew that Neville wouldn't mention it, so she decided to tell Harry. "I thought she was going to bust a gut trying to get over to them. Professor McGonagall managed to get your sister and Astoria to safety but it was too late for Katherine."

Neville looked uncomfortable as Harry held out his hand. "Thanks Neville."

Neville stepped forward and shook Harry's hand. "It's what anyone would have done."

Seville continued with her storytelling. "That's not all Neville did. Jamie Potter was mouthing off about you being a crap flyer and only being able to be a seeker by using someone else's broom. Georgie told him off, so he called her something rude. Neville punched him in the face."

Neville went red. "He shouldn't speak to girls like that." He'd gotten a detention from Professor McGonagall but it had been worth it.

Harry suspected that Neville had something of a crush on his little sister. "Thanks for looking out for her."

Neville brushed off Harry's thanks. "It's okay. I know you'd do the same for my sister."

Hermione had finally gotten Georgie to stop crying. "I think we should leave Harry alone to get some sleep."

All four of the children headed towards the door, only for Harry to call out. "Nev, can I have a minute with you?"

Neville told the others he'd be along shortly. He had a feeling that he knew that Harry was going to say. "This is about Georgie isn't it?"

"Do you like her?" Harry got straight to the point.

Neville sat down. "I think so but I'm really confused. I thought that I liked Hermione but I've never wanted to defend her like I did with Georgie." Neville flushed. "She's so sweet and thoughtful, and I care a lot about her."

"Right now I think she's too young to have a boyfriend who's as old as you." Harry winced as he realized how much like his Dad he sounded.

"I agree. I'd feel the same as you if it was my sister we were talking about." Neville's statement mollified Harry. "If I still feel the same about Georgie in a couple of years, then I'll ask her out but until then I'm just going to be her friend." Neville was in no rush to get into another fiasco like his abortive engagement to Hermione.

Harry was thankful that Neville was so understanding. "Now if I could just get Auri to think like that about Draco, I'd be a very happy brother."

"Auri is rather intense about him, isn't she?" Neville grinned. "I don't know why but Auri comes across as being more able to take care of herself than Georgie does. I couldn't see Auri needing Draco to defend her. She's definitely not the fragile type."

Harry smiled back. "No she's not." Harry's smile slipped a little. "Then again, Georgie proved today exactly why she's a Gryffindor."

Neville looked proud. "She was fearless. She didn't think about herself; just about Auri."

"Thanks again for stopping her. I don't know how I would have coped if she'd died." Harry's tone was grave.

“Think nothing of it.” Neville heard the door open.

Hermione came back in. “I just wanted one last word with Harry.”

Neville took the hint and shook Harry’s hand again, before leaving. “I’ll be up to see you tomorrow.”

Hermione waited until Neville had gone. “I almost forgot to tell you. Your Dad said to say that he’ll be by in the morning.”

“Tell him he doesn’t have to and that I’ll be fine.” Harry didn’t know what to say to Remus; he was still angry at him over Anna but he also felt guilty that Remus had risked his own life to save him.

“Harry, you can’t be mad at him forever.” Hermione had been initially shocked when Harry had explained to her about his Dad and Professor Jameson. She knew that Harry hadn’t been too happy with her when she’d told him that she thought that Remus had been right to punish him after the way he’d spoken to his Dad and Professor Jameson.

Harry refused to back down. “I know that; I just don’t want to see him right now.”

“I’ll let him know.” Hermione let the subject drop. “By the way, Ravenclaw won the match.”

Harry was puzzled. “But how?”

“Apparently you had the snitch in your hand when you were brought into the hospital wing. Madam Hooch declared Ravenclaw the winners. You should have seen Ginny Prewett’s face.” Hermione hadn’t like the look the girl had worn on hearing the news. “She really wasn’t happy.”

Harry was thrilled until he realized something. “I’ve just thought. I was riding Draco’s Firebolt when I fell off. He’s going to kill me.”

Hermione shook her head. "George grabbed it; the broom's just fine. Draco was more concerned about you."

Harry relaxed. "I can't believe we won."

"Well, Ravenclaw did. I'm a Slytherin in case you've forgotten." Hermione jabbed Harry in the shoulder making him recoil. She was instantly contrite as Harry turned white. "I'm sorry, I've hurt you."

"It's nothing." Harry lied; he'd felt a sharp pain shoot down his back when Hermione had prodded him.

Hermione ignored him and walked across to Madam Pomfrey's office where she knocked on the door. "Madam Pomfrey, I think I just hurt Harry when I prodded him."

Poppy frowned and got up. "I can't leave you students alone for a minute." On reaching Harry's bed she ran her wand over him. "You haven't done any lasting damage. I'll just go and get a pain relieving potion and something to help him sleep."

Harry hated taking potions. "Thanks Hermione. I thought you were supposed to be my friend."

"I am." Hermione felt bad about hurting him. "I'd better get going, it's almost curfew. Can I come and see you tomorrow?"

Harry nodded. "I'd like that."

Poppy appeared behind Hermione. "He'll be free to leave by Tuesday morning as long as you don't do him any more damage."

"Yes, Madam Pomfrey." Hermione squeezed Harry's hand before fleeing.

"Now then, open up." Poppy turned to a resigned looking Harry who obediently took the vials from her and swallowed them. Poppy watched as he fell asleep. She was just glad that she hadn't got a ward full of injuries after the Dementor attack. After checking that her other patients, two second years suffering from a bad cold, were

alright, she headed back to her room, only to have to come back out after ten minutes when she heard the door to the ward opening.

Remus stepped inside. He'd been dismayed when Hermione had told him that Harry didn't want to see him. "Poppy, how is he?"

"He'll be fine. He just needs some rest." Poppy informed him. "Come into my office. We can have a cup of tea."

Remus followed her in. "Would you like something stronger? I expect your day has been pretty awful."

Poppy declined. "I'd like to after today's events but think I'd better not."

As headmaster, Dumbledore had had to explain to their parents what had happened to Dennis and Katherine but it had been her who had had to watch as they were shown the soulless shells of their children in order to be able to say goodbye. Thankfully Alice Longbottom had come from St. Mungo's to end the children's lives but it had still been hard on Poppy and she'd been unable to watch as Alice had administered the killing curse on both of the children.

"Why don't you get some sleep? I'll take care of Harry and your other patients." Remus felt sorry for the nurse. "Hermione's offered to stay with the girls which means I'm free to stay here until morning."

"I'd appreciate a few hours sleep." Poppy thanked Remus and started towards the door. "Call me if you need me."

"I will." Remus reassured her before calling for a house elf to get him a book. Moving into the ward, he sat down by Harry's bed.

Harry awoke the next morning to find Remus asleep at his bedside. Harry felt a little guilty as his Dad looked terribly tired. Remus opened his eyes but said nothing.

Harry spoke first. "Thanks for saving me."

"I'm just glad that you're alright." Remus didn't touch Harry as he couldn't deal with another rejection.

"Hermione told me you ignored the Dementors to save me and nearly died." Harry wanted his Dad to hug him but didn't know how to ask without losing face.

Remus shrugged. "I couldn't just let you fall."

Harry then realized that Remus should have been with his sister. "Where's Auri?"

"Hermione stayed with her and Astoria." Remus didn't reveal that he'd actually been in the ward all night. "I should actually get back. I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"I'll be fine." Harry told Remus, who got up.

"I'll see you in class then." Remus left the hospital wing, wishing he could reach out to Harry but not quite knowing how to.

26th March 1994

Peter watched as the red-haired woman talked with a dark-haired boy. He guessed that the boy must be Sirius' eldest. He waited until Lily eventually shepherded the boy off to bed. Only once Lily was alone, did Peter transform. "Hello Lily."

Lily blanched and reached for her wand, only to find it missing. "Get away from me."

"Please, Lily, I need you to listen to me. I didn't give you up to You-Know-Who." Peter backed away from her not wanting to seem threatening, despite the fact he was holding her wand, only to bump into something warm. He spun round to find Sirius standing there, a cold look on his face. Peter spoke hesitantly. "Sirius, please..."

Remus stepped through the fireplace to find Orion weeping in Lily's arms, and Sirius leaning over them. "What's wrong?"

Sirius looked across at Remus. "Pettigrew broke in." Sirius nodded towards the sitting room.

Remus walked in to find Peter's body; he'd obviously been involved in a duel of some sort. Unfortunately for Peter, he'd failed to be the victor.

Remus re-entered the room he'd just left. "What happened?"

Lily looked over her son's head. "I'd just sent Orion to bed when Pettigrew appeared and tried to tell me that he hadn't given me up to You-Know-Who. He had my wand. He must have thought that Sirius was out." Lily's voice faltered as she remembered the look on Sirius' face at the sight of the man who had helped to kill his best friend and her first husband.

Sirius took up the story. "I told him to put down the wand; that I was going to take him to the Ministry. He refused. We had just begun a duel when Orion came back down; he'd forgotten his book. Pettigrew turned on him. I was afraid for my son, and used the killing curse on Pettigrew."

"We need to call the Aurors." Remus marched towards the fireplace, only for it to flare up and for Minerva to step into the room, quickly followed by Dae.

Minerva immediately realized that something had happened. "What's up?"

Remus outlined what had transpired. "Pettigrew. He tried to attack Lily and Orion. Sirius had to kill him; he used an unforgiveable curse."

Dae scowled at Sirius. "Why didn't you just stun him?"

"He turned a wand on my son." Sirius snarled. "I'd do the same again if it came down to it."

Dae sighed as he held out his hand. "I'll need your wand and for you to come with me. We can get this sorted out at the Ministry."

Sirius passed his wand over to Dae who slipped it into his pocket. He turned to Lily. "I'll be back as soon as I can."

Dae pulled Remus aside. "Can you send Pettigrew's body through after Black and I go through?"

He then addressed Minerva. "It might be a good idea to obliviate Orion."

Minerva walked over to Lily and whispered into her ear, so Orion wouldn't hear. Lily wasn't too happy about the idea of obliviation but she didn't want Orion to go through the same thing that Scarlett-Rose had. Nia had eventually agreed to her daughter's obliviation, but only once it had become apparent that she wasn't getting over what had happened.

"If I agree, I want Sirius to do it." Lily told Dae.

Dae pulled out Sirius' wand and passed it to him. "I'd like it back when you've finished."

Sirius knelt down before Orion. "Orion, look at me please."

Orion lifted his head from his mother's shoulder and Sirius spoke quietly. "Obliviate." Orion shook himself. "Mum?"

"It's alright honey. You were having a nightmare, so I brought you down here. Do you want to go back to bed?" Lily gently rocked her son as she spoke.

Orion shook his head, so Sirius slipped out of the room and returned with a small vial. "Orion, can you drink this for me?"

Orion had had Dreamless Sleep potion before, so he downed it as he was told and within a few moments was fast asleep.

Sirius let out a deep breath and passed his wand back to Dae, before lifting his son out of his mother's arms. "He'll sleep until the morning. I doubt he'll remember even being awake. I'll just pop him in bed and I'll be straight back."

By the time Sirius came back into the room, Peter's body was floating in front of the fireplace. "Shall we get this done then?" He turned to Lily. "Close the fireplace after we leave."

Dae addressed Minerva, who had been talking quietly with Remus. "Can you inform everyone that the meeting has been cancelled?"

Minerva nodded and stepped into the fireplace before disappearing. One-by-one, Dae, Sirius and finally Peter's body followed her. Once they had all left, Lily spoke a few words and the fireplace glowed slightly before resuming its usual appearance.

Lily's face crumpled as soon as she had finished, and she didn't resist as Remus pulled her into his arms. "I thought he was going to kill me. I should have transformed but I was so frightened I couldn't think straight."

Remus felt bad that he couldn't tell her that Peter hadn't been a threat but he couldn't do that without telling her what he was. "It's going to be alright now."

Lily wept, feeling safe wrapped in Remus' embrace. "I don't know what I would have done if he'd hurt Orion."

Remus maneuvered Lily across to the sofa and sat her down. He moved over to the drinks cabinet and poured her a large brandy. "Drink this."

Lily did as she was told; the drink immediately having a calming effect. "Thanks. I'm so grateful you're here."

Remus poured himself a drink and sat down by Lily. "Do you want me to stay until Sirius gets back?"

"Would you?" Lily wasn't normally a nervous person but the evening's events had unsettled her.

"I wasn't planning on doing anything else, and no-one's expecting me back." Remus had told Dumbledore that he was going to see his

daughter and wouldn't be back until the next day. Leo had agreed to cover any problems that arose. He was just glad that Cassie and Scarlett-Rose, who was staying with Lily and Sirius, hadn't come down when Peter had been there. "I'd planned to return to see Scarlett in the morning anyway."

"Then you can stay the night." Lily was glad that Remus didn't have to get back to Hogwarts. Lily took a sip of the brandy that was left in her glass and shuddered. "I think I'll get myself a glass of wine."

She poured herself a glass and sat down. "I think I need to talk about something other than Peter Pettigrew. So tell me, how is Jamie doing at school?"

Remus made a small moue. "Do you want me to lie or give you the unvarnished truth?"

Lily frowned at his options. "The unvarnished truth."

Remus was hoping she'd go for the unvarnished version. "He's a troublemaker. He's had more detentions than any other Gryffindor except his best friend. He's constantly rude to Harry and his friends. In fact, Neville Longbottom gave him a black eye last month when he swore at Georgie for defending Harry."

"At least I can count on you for being honest." Lily hated the thought that her son was making a nuisance of himself. "How are his grades?"

Remus pulled a face. "Consistent but only at an acceptable level. I've talked to another teacher about him and she feels the same. He relies on who he is to get by."

Lily was disappointed but not surprised. "He's definitely guaranteed himself a talk with Sirius when he returns home from school. How's Harry doing? He's not said much in his letters, just that he's okay."

"Academically he's almost top of his year; only Hermione Snape ranks above him." Remus knew that while Harry was doing well academically, he wasn't so happy in his personal life.

"How's his animagus training coming along? He hasn't mentioned it for ages." Lily had enjoyed talking to Harry when she had been instructing him, and had felt a little left out since he'd reverted to lessons with Severus.

"It's not." Remus informed her. "I stopped him from doing it last month as a punishment."

Lily groaned. "Don't tell me I've got two troublemaking sons."

Remus shook his head. "I'm partly to blame for this one. We had a bit of an argument after he found out about Nia remarrying."

Lily could tell Remus wasn't telling her everything. "And..."

Remus ran a hand through his hair and sighed. "Harry found out that his muggle studies teacher is actually his former nanny, and he threw a fit when he found out that I'd slept with her while I was still married to Nia."

"How did he find out?" Lily wasn't surprised by Remus' confession.

"She's the one I marked." Remus admitted. "Having already seen the mark the day after I gave it to Anna, Harry put two and two together, and unfortunately came up with four. It didn't help that he found out on the same day that he received a letter from Nia telling him about her forthcoming marriage."

"So you're punishing him for being upset?" Lily wasn't very happy with Remus.

"No. I'm punishing him for being rude to his professor and using inappropriate language." Remus told her exactly what Harry had said.

"I think you should cut him some slack, Remus. He'll resent you if you don't." Lily knew too well from experience what that was like. "I've had similar problems with Anna and Jamie. Then again, after what you've told me about Jamie, I wonder if I haven't been too soft on him."

"Perhaps, but I think fame has a lot to do with it." Remus didn't want Lily to blame herself for Jamie.

Lily decided not to dwell on Jamie. "You mentioned Hermione's doing well academically. How's her animagus training going?"

"Hermione's doing extremely well. She's actually found her form." Remus remembered how excited Hermione had been about it. He'd been there, waiting to talk to Severus, when she'd flown out of Severus' study wanting to tell her mother.

"What is she going to be?" Lily was pleased that she'd had something to do with it, even if it had only been at the initial stages.

"A dog." Remus grinned. "I think she was hoping that she'd be something cute and fluffy."

Lily knew that Remus was grinning for a reason. "What type of dog?"

"A Doberman pinscher. Needless to say she wasn't too happy until Severus found a book on them for her which explained that they reflect great nobility and temperament. When he also told her that they are considered to be determined, fearless, and loyal, she went from being a little down to one very happy young lady." Remus smiled as he remembered how Hermione's face had been transformed from despondent to thrilled.

"I'm pleased for her." Lily returned to the subject of Harry. "Please reconsider dropping Harry's punishment. He's gone through enough. Don't you think that the fact that Hermione got there first is punishment enough for him?"

Remus had always found it hard to say no to Lily. "I'll tell him he can resume his lessons when I get back to school tomorrow night."

Lily beamed. "Thank you."

A sharp crack signaled Sirius' return. He walked into the drawing room to find Remus and Lily chatting together. "The Ministry isn't going to charge me with anything. They've declared it to be a clear-

cut case of defense of a family member. In fact, I think Fudge is overjoyed that he has some good news to give to the public after the Dementor debacle at Hogwarts.”

Lily felt thankful that the Ministry weren't going to prosecute Sirius. “I didn't think they would do anything, but I was still concerned.”

Remus watched as Lily got up from the sofa and slid her arms around Sirius' waist.

Bending his head, Sirius tenderly kissed Lily, savoring the feel of her body against his own, before relinquishing her lips. “Are you alright?”

Lily smiled lovingly up at him. “Remus fed me a brandy to calm me down and then filled me in how Jamie and Harry are doing. It helped to take my mind off what had happened.”

The couple was so involved in each other that both of them missed the look of pain that had flitted across Remus' face when Sirius had kissed Lily. “If you'll both excuse me, I'll be off.”

Lily turned around, pulling free of Sirius' hold. “But I thought you were going to stay the night. Scarlett will be upset if she doesn't see you.”

Sirius slid his arm back around Lily's waist before backing his wife up. “Lily's right. Let's have a drink together. It's not like I couldn't do with one after this evening. One of the house elves can get a room ready for you.”

Not wanting to seem ill-mannered, Remus relented. “I give in. I'll stay.”

Next chapter: Hogsmeade visits resume; Dumbledore is frustrated as he discovers information about a missing piece of his puzzle; Harry and Hermione are attacked.

Chapter 38: Three Discussions, Two Discoveries and A Disaster

12th March 1994

Harry sighed heavily. "It's not fair. I don't see why I should be made to give up my animagus lessons just because he slept with Johanna, I mean Anna." Harry still hadn't gotten used to thinking of Johanna as Anna.

Hermione threw her quill down onto the table. She sympathized with Harry's position but after hearing the same complaint for the tenth time that day she had just about had enough. "Harry, for goodness sake, please shut up."

Taken aback by Hermione's irritated tone, Harry scowled at her. "But it isn't fair."

"I know you think that. But I don't need to hear about it every single moment of every single day. You know very well that your father only cancelled the lessons because you were so rude to him and Professor Jameson." Hermione snapped.

Harry's face change from shocked to stubborn. "I wouldn't have been so rude if he'd told me about Anna in the first place."

Hermione reigned in her temper. "Tell me, Harry what purpose would it have served for your father to have told you that he'd slept with Professor Jameson?"

As Virginie already knew all about Remus, Hermione had talked to her mother about what had happened after the second consecutive week of listening to Harry complaining. She'd known that eventually she'd have to talk to Harry about his Dad, but in order to deal with him she'd needed to get someone else's perspective on coping with the situation.

Harry thought about Hermione's question for a moment. "I would have at least found out from him and not in the way I did."

“But you didn’t need to know at all.” Hermione could see that Harry was itching to say something, so she held up her hand. “Don’t say anything; just listen to me. Your father is entitled to some privacy in his life, so I can understand why he didn’t tell you that he’d slept with Professor Jameson. When you start dating will you tell your father about every girl you sleep with, or about the mistakes you’ll inevitably make?”

Harry blushed at Hermione’s forthrightness. “Why would I? It wouldn’t have anything to do with him.”

“Just as your father sleeping with Professor Jameson had nothing to do with you.” Hermione pointed out.

“But she was my nanny.” Harry argued.

“It doesn’t matter what she was. What they did was something that was a personal experience between the two of them.” Hermione was now really thankful she’d discussed the matter with her mother. “You didn’t ask for the names of all the other women your father had slept with, did you?”

Harry grimaced. “I doubt he’d remember them anyway.”

“That’s beside the point.” Hermione reasoned. “You’re only bothered because Professor Jameson was your nanny, and not some faceless woman you were ever likely to meet. I think you felt that she belonged to you, and that your father betrayed your trust by ruining the memory of the relationship you had with Professor Jameson.”

Harry glowered. “Well he did ruin it, and I still don’t see why I should have to suffer for something he did.”

Hermione wanted to scream, but instead counted to ten before she responded in a level voice. “Harry, be honest with me. It’s not the actual loss of your lessons that truly bothers you is it? It’s the fact that your father didn’t tell you he’d slept with Professor Jameson isn’t it?”

Harry knew Hermione was right and nodded.

Encouraged, Hermione continued. "Harry, your father is only human. He and Professor Jameson obviously had some sort of attraction to each other and, stupidly, acted upon it. Is it any different than you kissing me in the swimming pool? As far as you knew then, I was still engaged to Dae, and yet you kissed me anyway. Tell me how it's any different than how your father acted."

Harry hated his own behavior being compared to Remus'. "But you said then that kissing you didn't make me anything like my Dad. Now you're now saying the complete opposite."

"But I'm not. What I'm trying to show you is that both you and your father are human and that you both make mistakes. Your father went a lot further than you and that is what makes you different from him. You stopped, he didn't. Despite the fact that you stopped, you nevertheless still took that first step." Hermione hoped that her remarks were finally getting through to Harry.

Harry didn't respond until a few minutes had gone by. "Why couldn't he have stopped?"

Hermione knew by the change in Harry's voice that he was finally starting to listen. "I don't know, Harry. I don't think he did it to hurt you even though that's exactly what he did."

"Anna could have stopped him as well." Harry knew he sounded half-hearted.

"Yes, she could have." Hermione didn't try to argue the point. "However, look at how bad she must have felt. You said yourself she said that she wasn't proud of what she'd done."

Harry still couldn't quite let it go. "She still did it though."

Hermione felt as though she was running on the spot. "Look at what she's lost because of it. You said that she didn't really have any family except for all of you; that she never really ever mentioned her parents. Because of a stupid mistake she made, she had to give all of you up."

“She still had her Dad.” Harry was more tenacious than a terrier which wasn’t quite ready to put down its favorite toy. “So she wasn’t exactly alone.”

“Just because you’ve got a parent, it doesn’t mean that you have someone.” Hermione put her hand over Harry’s. “Think of how you felt when you and your father weren’t speaking. Did you feel like you could go to him?”

Harry shook his head. “I wanted to but I couldn’t.”

“Perhaps Anna felt the same way about her father.” Hermione looked down as Harry laced his fingers through hers. “It must have been so hard for her when she found out that you and Dudley were here, and she couldn’t tell you who she was. Think how you’d feel if it was you in her position; not being able to reach out to someone you’d once spent all that time with. To give up all of that, she must really have regretted what she’d done.”

“Do you really think she was truly sorry for what she’d done?” Harry really wanted to believe what Hermione was telling him. Anna had been a big part of his life, and he had missed her.

Hermione let out the breath she’d been holding. “Harry, I think she must have been. Look at how far she went to hide from your father. She should have told you who she was when she started, but she must have been scared you’d tell your father, and she probably wasn’t ready to deal with that. From what you told me, I think she was possibly in love with him.”

For the first time Harry saw it from Anna’s point of view. “If that’s true, then I must have really hurt her when I told her about Dad.”

Hermione squeezed Harry’s hand. “You probably did, but you can do something about it now if you really want to.”

Letting go of Hermione’s hand, Harry made a decision. “I think I need to talk to Anna.”

Hermione sent a silent prayer of thanks to her mother; she'd have never been able to deal with the conversation without her help. "I'll see you later then."

Harry kissed Hermione on the cheek before walking out of the library. "Thanks."

Hermione touched her cheek before picking up her quill, and settling back down to get her homework done.

Anna was in the middle of marking some third year essays when a quiet knock disturbed her. Opening the door she was surprised to find Harry standing there. Not really sure what he wanted, Anna didn't immediately invite him in. "Is there something wrong?"

"Can I come in?" Harry could hear the nervousness in his voice.

"Of course." Anna walked into her room, leaving Harry to follow her in.

Once he was in the room, Harry shut the door behind him. Before his courage failed him, he blurted out what he wanted to say. "I want to apologize properly for the way I behaved towards you last month. I shouldn't have spoken to you in such a rude manner."

Anna was staggered. Harry's act of contrition was the last thing she had expected. "Thank you, Harry. In that case I accept your apology."

Harry hadn't finished. "I also shouldn't have told you about what Dad had done. He told me that in confidence and I threw it in your face. I must have really hurt you."

"To be honest, your behavior hurt me more than finding out about Remus." Anna didn't say that finding out about Remus had hurt almost as much though.

Harry looked down at the floor before looking back up at Anna. "I'm sorry. I should have at least have given you and Dad a chance to explain."

Anna sat down and patted the sofa beside her. "Do you want to talk about it now?"

Harry sat down as well, careful to still keep some distance between the two of them. "I think so."

Knowing that this was probably her one chance to make it right, Anna decided to be as honest as she could. "Harry, I loved working for Nia. She was not only my employer, but my best friend. Actually, she was pretty much my only friend. Not having any children of my own, I regarded you five as mine. I know you weren't but I did."

Harry felt warm inside at Anna's words. "And you were like having a big sister and a best friend."

Anna felt her throat close up at Harry's words, and she had to give herself a moment before she carried on. "Remus, however, was a completely different matter." When Harry didn't say anything, Anna continued. "When I was first working for Nia, Remus was never there, except for at the weekends. As I didn't really have to work weekends that often, I didn't really get to know him that well until he took the position that meant I got to interact with him more often." Anna could feel butterflies in her stomach at the thought of the first time she had really gotten to talk to Remus, and she stopped speaking.

Harry could see that Anna's hands were shaking, so he got up and walked over to where he could see a carafe of water sitting on a sideboard on the opposite side of the room. "Do you want a glass of water?"

Anna laughed wryly. "I could actually do with a stiff drink but water will be fine. This is turning out to be harder than I thought."

Harry poured them both a glass of water, before carrying the glasses over. "This might stop your hands from shaking."

Until Harry pointed it out, Anna hadn't even realized that her hands were, indeed, trembling. Taking the glass from Harry, Anna took a healthy mouthful, relaxing a little as she felt it settle her stomach. "Thank you, Harry." Anna took a deep breath before beginning again.

“As I was saying, I didn’t really know Remus that well.” Anna felt her butterflies begin again. “We started to spend a lot of time together, usually after Nia had gone to bed. Remus was not only well-traveled, but he was intelligent and witty as well. Before I knew it, I realized that I had feelings for him.”

“Did you want to sleep with him then?” Harry kept any censure out of his voice.

“Not then I didn’t. I just knew that I really liked him, but I had no intention of acting on my feelings, so I simply pushed them aside. Everything was okay until the time your mother had to go into hospital.” Anna could see that Harry had become tense, as he already knew that this was when she’d slept with Remus. Taking Harry’s chin in her hand, Anna tipped up his head so she could look him directly in the eye. “Are you really sure you want to hear this? You’re not going to like it.”

Harry nodded. “I want to know exactly why you did what you did.”

Anna removed her hand and let her mind drift back to that night. “I didn’t think I’d planned it, but with hindsight, I think maybe I did. After you all went to bed, I went as far as getting showered and changed; I’d bought wine and a nice meal. We drank far too much that evening; Remus even went out for more wine. I can still remember the cracking sound of his apparition; he told me that he’d broken a bottle when I asked what the noise was. Nothing happened, however, until we were halfway through watching a movie; our hands touched and one thing led to another. You can pretty much guess the rest.”

“So you intended to sleep with my Dad?” Harry couldn’t believe that Anna had been so calculating.

“Not consciously.” Anna put down the glass and faced Harry. “I know what I did was wrong, but I truly believed I was in love with your father.” Anna suddenly blushed. “I’d never slept with anyone before Remus. I thought that our making love had been something special. It was only when you told me that he’d gone to get Nia from the hospital that the implications of what I’d done hit me. I couldn’t cope with

seeing Remus on a day-to-day basis, so I eventually handed in my notice and left.”

Harry remembered the day that Anna had left. He and his siblings had pretty much cried for the entire day. “Do you regret sleeping with him?”

“That’s quite a loaded question.” Anna picked her water back up and swallowed some of it before answering. “I don’t regret that your Dad made my first time something special but I do regret hurting everyone.”

After his recent timeline discovery, Harry had a question for Anna. “If you could go back in time, would you do it again?”

“Absolutely not.” Seeing Harry relax, Anna was glad that for the first time since their conversation had began, she’d actually lied. “I had to give up so much because of one night; you; the other children; my friendship with Nia; a job I loved.”

“Why did you disappear when you did?” Harry still didn’t understand why Anna had waited so long.

“I didn’t want to open myself up to temptation.” Anna admitted. “After I left my job, I thought that I’d get over Remus. When I found out that he’d nearly died, I knew then that I was still in love with him. I therefore decided to make a clean break of things.”

Harry spoke quietly. “We all had such a good time in Florida, and when you disappeared and didn’t contact us again, I felt really miserable. I thought we’d done something wrong and that you hated us.”

“I’d never hate you.” Anna pulled Harry into a hug, feeling relieved when he didn’t push her away. “I only left because I couldn’t bear to face up to what I’d done to Nia, and how I truly felt about your Dad. I’m sorry, I should have thought about what my disappearance would do to you.”

Being held by Anna, Harry felt almost like a small child again. He wished that things could go back to the way they had been. "Will you get in contact with Mum now? She wouldn't have to know why you left."

Anna released Harry and shook her head. "I'd like to but I've come to terms with the life I'm leading now. Seeing her again would just bring back bad memories. It's been difficult enough explaining to you and Remus why I left, but having to tell Nia would be impossible. I don't want to have to lie to her anymore. I'd rather she was just left to think that I disappeared."

"I won't say anything to her." Harry then asked the question he was most nervous about getting an answer to. "Anna, are you still in love with my Dad?"

In answer, Anna pulled out a necklace from her around her neck. "I'm engaged to be married now."

Harry felt a flood of relief at Anna's news. "I'm glad you've got someone who cares about you. Is he a wizard?"

Anna suspected that part of Harry's happiness for her had more than a little to do with the fact that it meant that she wasn't free to pursue Remus. "No, he's a muggle but we're happy."

A comfortable silence fell between the two of them, before Anna broke it. "Harry, I'd really like it if we could put what's happened behind us. What I did to you all was a terrible thing but I've had to live with the regret ever since. If you don't want to, then I'll understand but I will miss you."

Having talked things through with Anna and Hermione, Harry could finally see that Anna, like his Dad, was just human and that she'd made an appalling mistake. A mistake she now appeared to be truly sorry for. He'd forgiven his Dad already for what he'd done; to not offer the Anna the same chance would be unfair to her. "I'd like that very much as well."

In her relief, Anna felt tears threatening. "Thank you Harry. That means a lot to me."

Harry smiled at her. "I'm glad I came to talk you."

Anna wondered if he'd spoken to Remus about her yet. "Harry, did you talk with Remus about coming to see me?"

Harry shook his head. "Dad doesn't know yet. He's gone to see my sister today. I'm going to speak to him tomorrow. I really owe him an apology for telling you about something I should never have passed on."

Anna and Remus had met a few times for dinner in her rooms and she knew how bothered Remus was by the strained relationship he and Harry now had. "I'm really pleased. Your Dad has been worried about you."

Harry frowned. "You've been talking to him?"

Anna decided not to mention the dinners, even though they had been nothing more than two colleagues getting together to discuss current educational issues over a meal. "We've met a few times to discuss school matters and your name has come up."

"Oh." Harry let the matter drop. He now wanted nothing more than to try and forget about the whole thing. "Anna, can I ask you about something completely different?"

"What is it?" Anna asked warily.

"The quidditch match when the Dementors attacked." Harry still hadn't mastered the Patronus Charm, and was getting terribly discouraged by his lack of success.

Anna relaxed. "Ask away."

"Hermione told me that you were able to cast the Patronus Charm. I want to learn how to do it. I've tried on my own but I'm not getting anywhere." Harry explained. "Can you teach me?"

Anna had one question before she agreed to Harry's request. "Why not ask your Dad? He's the Defense teacher."

"Apart from the fact that we haven't really been speaking, he's got a lot on since the Headmaster restarted the dueling lessons, and at the weekends he quite often goes to see Scarlett." Harry had another reason for asking Anna. "I'd also like to spend a little time with you now that we've sorted things out, if that's okay."

Anna was thrilled at Harry's comment. "It is. If you want to come and see me tomorrow morning, we can give the charm a shot then." Anna watched Harry's face fall, and realized that he obviously wanted to try it now. "I won't lie to you. It is very difficult to learn and you might never manage it. However, I've got some free time, so why don't we try now?"

Harry eagerly shot out of his seat, and pulled out his wand. "Expecto Patronum." Nothing happened.

Anna stepped behind him, and took hold of his hand. "You're not quite getting the wand movement right."

Harry stood patiently as Anna moved his hand through the correct motion several times before letting go. "Expecto Patronum." Again, nothing happened. "It's just not working." Harry sounded frustrated.

"I don't think you're scared enough." Anna theorized. "We could do with a Dementor, but I have no wish to face one of those things anytime soon."

Harry thought about the Room of Requirement, and decided that, as the room belonged to the school, no-one would mind if he told Anna about it. "I know somewhere we can go where I can practice." Not giving her a chance to say anything, Harry grabbed Anna's hand and pulled her towards the door. "Come with me."

Ten minutes later Anna found herself in a huge room which had white padded floors and walls. It reminded her a little of a large marshmallow. On a table by the door sat a massive heap of

chocolate. It was almost as if the room had been made to practice fighting off Dementors. "This is a most convenient room, isn't it?"

Harry didn't want to discuss the room. "Can we try the spell again?"

Anna smiled at Harry's obvious avoidance of the question. "Try away." Her smile soon faded as a Dementor appeared in front of Harry. As she pulled out her wand, she wondered what kind of room this was.

Harry felt as if he'd been immersed in icy water but gamely held up his wand and called out the incantation. "Expecto Patronum." A small silvery wisp came out of his wand before he collapsed.

Anna called out the same incantation and watched as a scruffy looking Scottish Terrier ran at the Dementor. Thankfully the Dementor disappeared the moment it made contact with the dog. She bent over Harry. "Enervate."

Harry opened his eyes and looked up to see Anna staring down at him. "I want to try again."

Anna shoved a bar of chocolate at him. "Eat this and I'll let you try once more."

Harry bolted the chocolate down in his hurry to try the spell for a second time.

Anna stood back as Harry got up from the floor. Once more a Dementor appeared and Harry called out the spell. Again just a small wisp of silver appeared before Harry was overcome, and Anna again dispelled the Dementor.

As Harry came round, Anna passed him more chocolate. "That's it for today. You've done well to be able to produce the silvery mist; some people will never even achieve that."

Harry looked disappointed but didn't argue the point as he was still shaking despite the chocolate that was slowly warming him up. "Can we meet tomorrow?"

Anna nodded. "We can." She looked around the room. "How did you find this place, and exactly what is it?"

"I found it by chance." Harry lied. "I was marching up and down the corridor thinking about somewhere I needed to do some studying when the door suddenly appeared. After I got in, one of the house elves appeared and told me what the room did."

"And that is?" Anna prompted Harry when he stopped.

"The house elves call it the Room of Requirement. If you need something, you just wish for it and it appears." Harry proved his point by wishing for a glass of milk which he passed to Anna. "Try it."

Anna took the glass off him and hesitantly took a small sip. "It's definitely milk."

"You can't take it out of the room though. You can only take out whatever you bring in." Harry explained as the glass vanished from out of Anna's hand.

Anna knew that while Harry wasn't lying about what the room did, he had, however, lied to her about how he'd found it. As a child, Harry had always played with his hair whenever he had been trying to cover something up. When Anna had asked him about how he'd discovered the room, his hand had immediately begun to tug nervously on his ponytail. However, as she didn't want to upset their newly re-established relationship, she didn't call him on it. "Well, it was certainly a most prodigious find."

Harry was relieved that Anna believed him. "It was, wasn't it?" Harry's stomach suddenly rumbled, despite the amount of chocolate he'd just eaten.

Anna checked her wristwatch. "I think it's time for dinner. Come on, let's go and get something to eat."

The two of them left the room and headed in the direction of the Great Hall.

April 10th 1994

Albus pored over the papers he was close to finishing translating. As he translated the very last sentence of the page he was on, Albus swore. He couldn't believe it. He'd held one of the Deathly Hallows and had given it away, and to Jamie Potter of all people. He decided to send a house-elf to see if the boy had it with him but knew it would have to wait until the students were all in their lessons.

His contact at the Ministry was doing his best to track down the location of the Elder Wand which Albus suspected was being held there. Grindelwald had sworn that he no longer had the wand and that he had given it to a Ministry employee. Not believing him, Albus had killed Grindelwald before searching him and ripping Grindelwald's rooms apart. However, on finding nothing, Albus had had to accept what Grindelwald had told him, and he'd been trying to track the wand down ever since.

The final part of the Hallows, a ring, had been easy to locate. However, he hadn't dared slip it on as it was protected by multiple layers of warding. He knew it might take some time to unravel them but he didn't want to rush it as he couldn't take the chance that he might end up destroying the ring.

As it was getting late, Albus opened up the cupboard in his office, and slipped the ring and the papers into a small drawer inside, before carefully warding it. Anyone trying to open the drawer wouldn't survive to tell anyone else about it.

May 15th 1994

Remus was a little distracted as he watched Harry and Hermione disappear around the corner ahead of them as they walked back together from Hogsmeade. The visits had been reinstated once news of Pettigrew's demise had been made public. He turned to Anna. "Sorry, I missed what you said."

"I was just asking you about your plans for the summer." Anna knew that Remus wasn't too happy that Harry and Hermione had spent the

day together in Hogsmeade. She could understand Remus' concern; she herself didn't really want Harry getting together with a girl who was engaged to someone else.

Remus was about to answer her when he heard Harry cry out. Both of them broke into a sprint, Anna reaching the fallen children just after Remus.

Remus pulled out his wand. "Enervate." Neither child moved.

Anna took out her own wand only for a green curse to come hurtling towards her. Pushing her out of the way, Remus didn't dare move as the curse sailed over his head, missing him by inches. Anna by now had moved to shield the children with her own body, and she gasped as a silver masked Death Eater walked casually out from the bushes nearby.

Remus swore as he identified the mask, and he swiftly pulled off the ring he wore on his right ring finger. Making sure Anna was still in contact with both children, Remus dropped the ring onto the group, whispering 'Sanctuary' the moment the ring contacted Anna's back.

Amicus strolled calmly forward. "Crucio."

Remus fell to the ground screaming, his body contorting until he felt as if his spine would snap.

Amicus dropped the spell. "That was a bad move, Lupin. A very bad move."

Remus managed to scramble to his knees, panting heavily. As he did so, Amicus grabbed him by the hair and apparated them both away.

Anna yelped as she landed still lying on top of Harry and Hermione. A man was standing facing her, his wand drawn. "Who are you?"

"I might ask the same question of you." Anna slowly climbed to her feet, keeping her wand held out in front of her.

"Felidae Venant." Dae informed her.

“Anna Jameson.” Anna relaxed as she recognized the name of Hermione’s fiancé.

Dae lowered his wand so that he could pick Hermione up and place her on a sofa. “What happened?”

Anna followed suit with Harry. “One of the other teachers, Remus Lupin, and I were walking past the area close to the Shrieking Shack on our way back from Hogsmeade, when we heard Harry cry out. He and Hermione had gone ahead of us. Both children were unconscious by the time we reached them. Remus tried to enervate them but nothing happened. Remus pushed me aside as a killing curse was sent my way. One moment I was watching a man, who looked remarkably like a Death Eater, walk out of the bushes, and the next I was here.” Anna spoke hurriedly, aware that time was of the essence. “I’ve got to go back. Remus is all alone.”

Dae frowned as he ran his wand over Hermione. If he was correct, there was only one person he knew that used the curse he thought had been placed on Hermione. “Describe the Death Eater to me please.”

Anna did as she was asked. “I’d say he was about six feet tall, and wore a silver mask with an intertwined embossed snake and skull on it.”

“Shit.” Dae stopped his diagnostics. “Don’t bother going back. Remus won’t be there, or if he is, he’s more than likely dead.” He suddenly apparated away, leaving Anna all alone.

Anna waited helplessly until Dae reappeared with an elderly looking man. “Mr. Venant, will you please tell me what is going on?”

Dae ignored Anna’s question and watched silently as the man who’d returned with him ran his wand first over Hermione, and then over Harry.

Henry Parr straightened up, and spoke to Dae. “You were right; she’s been hit with the Lentus Letifer curse, but the boy is just deeply

asleep. He should wake up soon; it will all depend on how strong the spell was.”

Anna was horrified as she translated the literal meaning of the curse that Hermione had been hit with. “Is there a countercurse?”

“At this stage, yes there is. However, she won’t fully recover for a few weeks. The first few hours won’t be pleasant for her, and I’m going to put her to sleep while the healing takes place.” Henry informed Anna before invoking the countercurse.

Anna advanced on the man as Hermione suddenly began to scream. “What the hell are you doing to her? I thought you were supposed to be healing her.”

Dae grabbed Anna by the arm. “He is. Hermione’s screaming is because of the curse.” Seeing Anna’s quizzical look, Dae explained. “The curse slowly and painfully begins to liquefy your internal organs from the moment its cast. However, the nastiest thing about the curse is that it not only leaves you aware of what’s happening, but it also holds you immobile; you can’t even scream. If someone saw you, they’d just think you were asleep. The countercurse has released Hermione’s ability to let us know that something is wrong.”

Anna watched as Henry put Hermione into a deep sleep using the same spell that had been cast on Harry. Hermione’s screaming stopped but her face was still contorted in pain. “She won’t wake up now for at least forty-eight hours, maybe longer. She needs to be watched for the first few hours, just in case she starts to bleed again.”

It was only as Dae lifted Hermione up that Anna noticed the blood marring her clothes. “I’ll move her to a bedroom, and get my mother to come and sit with her.”

The healer nodded to Dae. “I’ll drop by and tell Peri. It’ll save you from having to leave your guest.”

Dae smiled gratefully. “Thanks Henry. I really appreciate you’re coming here like this.”

“Think nothing of it, my boy.” Henry then disappeared.

Dae carried Hermione off through the wall by the main fireplace. Anna felt useless and went to sit by Harry, stroking his head as he moaned out loud. “Harry, sweetie, can you wake up for me?”

She hadn’t expected him to, so Anna wasn’t surprised that Harry just kept on sleeping. She jumped slightly as Dae spoke softly from behind her. “He’ll sleep for a while yet I should think.”

“What about Remus?” Anna wanted to go back and check on him.

“I checked the area by the Shrieking Shack with Henry. There was no sign of Remus there.” Dae knew that Amicus must have taken him.

“From the way you reacted, you obviously know who took him and who cursed the children. Tell me who is he.” Anna demanded.

“I can’t.” Dae felt frustrated by his own limitations. “When Harry wakes up, he’ll fill you in.”

Anna was confused. “Why can’t you tell me?”

“I just can’t.” Fraught after dealing with Hermione, Dae snapped at the woman in front of him.

Anna suddenly felt uncomfortable. “There’s more to this than just a simple attack isn’t there?”

Dae thankfully didn’t have to say anything as Harry’s sleepy voice interrupted them. “Why am I here?”

Anna rushed over to Harry and pulled him into her arms. “You were attacked.”

Harry pulled free of Anna’s embrace and looked around the room. “Dae, where’s my Dad and Hermione?”

Dae looked grim. “Hermione was hit by a slightly different curse than you. She’s in a guest room with my Mum, sleeping it off. She should

start to feel better in a few hours.” Dae sent a warning look to Anna; he didn’t want Harry seeing Hermione in so much pain. “I’m sorry Harry but I think Amicus has taken Remus.”

Harry went white. “Don’t tell me, Dad got in the way didn’t he?” Harry knew his Dad would rather die than let something happen to him.

Anna immediately caught onto Dae’s use of the Death Eater’s name. “Hold on. You told me you couldn’t tell me who had taken Remus but you just mentioned his name to Harry.”

“I already know who Amicus is. Dae can only discuss him if you already know his identity.” Harry hurriedly explained, not realizing that he’d just created more questions for Anna than he’d answered. “Anna, what exactly happened? I remember talking to Hermione when she suddenly collapsed. I saw a white light coming towards me and then I woke up here.”

“Remus and I weren’t that far behind you when we heard you cry out. Just after we reached you this Amicus person sent the killing curse at me, and Remus pushed me out of the way. I scrambled to cover the two of you with my body. Remus must have dropped this on to me.” Anna showed Harry the ring which she’d picked up from the floor next to her.

Harry looked at the ring before pocketing it, confirming Anna’s assumption. “It is Dad’s ring. Mum gave it to him for his 30th birthday.”

Anna was getting a little annoyed that the other two appeared to know exactly why Remus had been taken. “Harry, will you please just tell me exactly what is going on?”

Dae stepped in between Anna and Harry, and invoked a privacy bubble. “Harry, can you really trust her?”

Harry nodded. “I’d trust Anna with my life.”

Dae was satisfied with Harry's response. "It's up to you how much you want to tell her; I'll tell her about me. However, I suggest that you don't mention Leo or the fact that my parents are Unspeakables."

"I won't." Harry promised as Dae dropped the privacy bubble.

Anna looked expectantly at Harry. "So what's the verdict?"

In answer Dae rolled up his sleeve and dropped the glamour he usually had in place over his arm. Anna immediately began to pull her wand out, only for Harry's hand to stay her action. "He's not exactly what he seems."

Reacting to Harry's declaration, Anna replaced her wand. "I presume there's more?"

Harry smiled slightly. "Anna, this might be a bit of a shock, but Dae isn't the only Death Eater you know."

"Please don't tell me you're one as well." Anna waited for Harry to confirm her suspicions.

Harry allayed her fears about him. "It's not me; it's Dad."

Anna felt her legs starting to give way from her under and she sat down on the same sofa Harry had been lying on. "You can't be serious."

French appeared. "Brandy for you, Miss."

Not thinking, Anna took the glass from French, who subsequently disappeared. She'd been about to take a mouthful when she hesitated, and held the glass away from her, looking at it. "How did he know?"

Dae shrugged. "I've no idea. He's always been like that."

Anna took a sip of the brandy. "That's really good." Shaking herself, she turned her attention back to Harry. "So tell me, how did you find out about Remus?" She then spent the next twenty minutes listening

as Harry briefly outlined the situation to her. "So if Remus is a Death Eater doesn't that mean he'll be safe?"

Dae shook his head. "Amicus was obviously sent to kill you, and unfortunately Remus got in the way."

As more time had gone by, and Remus still hadn't returned, Harry finally asked the question he'd been dreading the answer to. "Amicus is going to kill him isn't he?"

Dae knelt down in front of Harry. "I don't know, but I have to be honest. There's a good chance he won't make it out of this alive. If he was going to, he should have been back by now."

Harry tried hard to control it, but a sob escaped from him. Anna slid down the leather sofa and put her arm around him. "I'm sure he'll be okay."

Wanting desperately to believe her, Harry tried to convince himself that he'd see his Dad again. "You're probably right."

Anna smiled through her own tears. "I know I'm right, and besides, I refuse to lose someone else I care about because of You-Know-Who and his damn sidekicks."

Harry latched onto Anna's remark. "Who else have you lost?"

"My mother." Anna's voice sounded shaky, and Harry tightened his grip on her. "She was murdered when I was quite young."

"I'm so sorry." Dae felt his heart go out to her.

As Anna could see that Dae was too polite to ask, she told him more about what had happened. "Despite Mum's social prominence, and the fact that her death made the headlines everywhere, they never found out the identities of the Death Eaters who killed her."

Harry wasn't quite as polite as Dae. "Your mother was famous? Was she anyone I'd know?"

Anna shook her head. "I doubt it as you weren't even born when she died."

"I might remember her. Who was she?" Dae's curiosity overrode his politeness.

"My father's Mack Jameson." Anna watched as recognition registered on both Harry and Dae's faces. "However, my mother used her maiden name of Selena Gregory." Anna wasn't surprised by the blank look on Harry's face but she was perturbed to see a look of dismay cross Dae's face.

Dae called out. "French." The small elf appeared. "Can you get me a bottle of wine and some juice for Harry? By the way, the lady's name is actually Anna."

French smiled politely at Anna before addressing Dae. "I'm just in the middle of something but I'll return with your drinks momentarily."

Anna gasped. "He really is amazing. Your house elf is not only intuitive but he also isn't subservient."

"I can't abide obsequious house elves." This was all the explanation Dae provided as French returned with the drinks Dae had requested. "So tell me, Anna, do you like Hogwarts?"

After seeing Dae's consternation at the mention of her mother, there was no way she was going to let him change the subject. "I do but what I really want to discuss is my mother."

Despite Anna's conviction that that was what she wanted, Harry could feel her trembling. "Are you sure you want to do this, Anna?"

Anna pulled Harry closer to her, and looked Dae directly in the eye. "I think you should fill Harry in on how she was murdered."

Dae didn't really want to discuss Selena Gregory but he realized that describing what had happened would be too much for Anna. Dae therefore did as Anna had asked, but left out the part about Selena being raped. "This isn't very pleasant Harry. After being subjected to

multiple curses, Selena Gregory's body and severed head were dumped in the foyer of the Ministry. However, before leaving her there, someone cut out Selena's heart and placed it in her mouth."

Harry felt sick. "That's horrible. I'm really sorry, Anna. We can talk about something else if you want to."

Anna kissed Harry on the top of his head. "Thanks sweetie, but I don't think Dae has quite finished telling me about my mother, have you?"

"Not exactly." Dae knew that there was no easy way to tell Anna. "Anna, your mother wasn't just infamous for her death, but also for her role in life."

Anna could feel her heart pounding. "Which was?"

"Voldemort's first lover." Dae waited for Anna to become upset and was astounded when she began to laugh instead.

Harry wondered if Anna had gone over the edge. He knew he wouldn't be laughing if someone had told him the same thing.

"You're trying to tell me that my mother slept with You-Know-Who?" Anna wiped away a tear as she struggled to control her mirth. "I think you've got the wrong woman. You might not be aware of the fact, but I've got a degree in wizarding history. I'm therefore pretty sure that a woman named Serenity was his first lover, and not my mother."

Dae knew that Anna was going to take some convincing. "Do you remember what Harry told about the Dark Lord's Lieutenants?"

"That both you and Remus had served in that position at one time or another." Anna couldn't see what this had to do with her mother. "But what's that..."

Dae cut her off. "Nothing else?"

Anna thought back over the conversation she'd had with Harry. "That they aren't known by their true names?"

As Dae nodded, the penny suddenly dropped for Anna. “You’re not trying to tell me that my mother was actually Serenity?”

Dae could tell that Anna still didn’t want to believe what he was trying to tell her. “I’m afraid so.”

Dae was right; Anna didn’t want to believe what he’d insinuated. “But Serenity was one of the most notorious Death Eaters ever. She was instrumental in creating the masks that they all still wear today.”

Dae had never sworn an oath to keep Serenity’s secrets as she had been killed long before he became a Death Eater, so he was able to freely divulge information about her to Anna and Harry. “That’s not all she did. She also came up with the idea of renaming those Death Eaters closest to the Dark Lord. She took pleasure in the notion of the fear that these unknown Death Eaters struck into the hearts of the others. Furthermore it was her idea to differentiate them by altering their masks.”

Anna thought she was going to throw up, and when she spoke her voice was barely a whisper. “Why did You-Know-Who kill her? I know it has to have been him.” Anna wanted to know the true reason for her mother’s death.

“It’s rumored that he found her in bed with another Death Eater, but nobody knows for sure. You already know what happened to your mother. If there was someone else involved no-one, except for the Dark Lord, knows what really happened to him.” Dae guessed that if there had been an unknown Death Eater, then he had taken the initial brunt of the Dark Lord’s anger, leaving Selena to deal with the aftermath.

Anna frowned. “How do you know all this? Remus just said that he’d heard of my mother and nothing more.”

Dae was surprised that Anna hadn’t guessed. “Remus did know, but he would have had to tell you what he was if he’d filled you in.”

Anna could have kicked herself. “I’m not really thinking straight.”

"I felt like that when I found out about Dad." Harry could still remember the sick feeling in his stomach as he'd watched his Dad reveal the Dark Mark. "I'm just glad that he did it because he was a spy, and not because he liked it."

After listening to Dae, Anna doubted very much that her mother had had such noble intentions. "I'm glad too." Anna looked at Dae. "Harry didn't mention your reasons for joining."

"That's because I've never really told him." Dae knew he was going to have to come clean. "I'm afraid I fall into the same category as your mother. I idolized the Dark Lord and, as a child, wanted nothing more than to become a Death Eater. My bedtime stories were about your mother and those like her."

Harry's expression was incredulous. "Who tells a child such stories?"

"I'm from a dark pureblood family where such stories are considered the norm." Dae laughed bitterly. "I'd been in the Dark Lord's service for less than a year when I found out what a fool I'd been. As you know, I eventually betrayed the Dark Lord and nearly died for that betrayal. Thankfully he now believes I'm dead."

"But I thought Death Eaters were linked to You-Know-Who through their Dark Mark." Anna pointed out the flaw in Dae's conviction that he was safe from the Dark Lord.

"I know when the Dark Lord's calling a meeting because my Dark Mark burns, but this is a signal that goes out to all Death Eaters. He can also call specific Death Eaters, but he's hardly like to bother with me as he already believes me to be dead." Dae informed her. "If the link went any deeper than that, I doubt very much whether I'd still be sitting here. Amicus wouldn't fail twice."

"You know who Amicus really is, don't you?" Anna asked.

Harry butted in before Dae had a chance to answer. "Dad said that the rumor is that you only get to see his face just before he kills you."

Dae nodded. "I don't know whether that's true or not, but yes, I've seen his face."

Not wanting to dwell on what Dae had told her about her mother, Anna focused her attention on the mystery Death Eater. "Why hasn't Remus been able to identify Amicus through his scent?"

Dae was impressed that Anna was thinking so clearly despite her protestations earlier that she wasn't. He knew that most women would have been in floods of tears after what he'd just told them. "Because he either doesn't have one..."

"...or he masks it." Harry finished the sentence off for him.

Anna was well aware of what it took to do that. "He'd constantly have to take potions to mask his scent, unless he's found a way of doing it permanently."

"I think it's probably permanent, but I don't know for sure." Dae admitted. "Remus said that he couldn't get anything from him at all."

Anna thought for a moment before asking her next question. "Why haven't you ever tried to kill him if you know who he is?"

"Because I've sworn not to." Dae regretted ever giving the oath. "If I hadn't made that oath, then I would have done everything I could to kill him."

"I'm guessing that Amicus isn't the only one with a secret identity, is he Dae?" Anna watched as Dae's expression became veiled. "You said that you were from a dark pureblood family. As a historian, I don't know of any family with the surname Venant. So tell me, Dae, who are you really?"

"We've only just met; I hardly think sharing my real identity with someone I barely know would be my most prudent move. Even Harry doesn't know who I am." Dae stuck out his tongue at Harry, in an effort to try and inject some levity into the conversation.

"You can tell me if you want to." Harry knew, however, that Dae was unlikely to do so.

Dae grinned at the pair of them. "Not going to happen right now. Needless to say I'm far better looking than this façade."

"And so modest too." Anna laughed as Dae had hoped she'd do, before returning to the topic of Amicus. "I have another question; why are you still alive if Amicus is the hotshot that everyone makes him out to be?"

"Because he made a mistake. He could have finished me off with a curse but instead decided to taunt me by dropping me over the edge of a cliff." Dae informed her.

Harry frowned. "But why would he do that?"

"I'm afraid of heights." Dae admitted. "Unfortunately, or should I say fortunately, Amicus was on a mission with me which involved staking out someone's home from the top of a tall building. I couldn't do it."

Anna interrupted the conversation. "Sorry boys but is there a bathroom somewhere in this glasshouse?"

French appeared. "Come with me, Miss Anna."

After Anna left, Harry picked up the thread of the conversation again. "Did Amicus punish you for it?"

"A short bout under the Cruciatus, but nothing much worse than that." Dae was quite matter-of-fact about what Amicus had done to him.

"So after he'd dropped you over the cliff, why do you think he didn't check on you?" Harry thought that Amicus had been quite sloppy.

"I don't think he thought that I'd survive the fall; it was rather a large drop. Mum found me and nursed me back to health, despite knowing what I was." Dae sometimes still found it hard to believe that Amicus had failed to check he was dead.

“So that’s two mistakes he’s made now.” Anna said as she walked back into the room.

“I expect he’ll be looking to finish the job.” Dae warned her. “You’ll have to be careful. I would suggest a glamour if you intend to go to Hogsmeade in the future.”

“But I still don’t know why he came after me in the first place.” It was a complete mystery to Anna. She knew that it couldn’t have been about money as he’d tried to kill her and not kidnap her. “And, if the rumor’s true, he didn’t even do me the courtesy of showing me his face.”

“Probably because you were in a public area; anyone could have come along.” Dae knew that Amicus wouldn’t have taken the risk of exposing who he was in such circumstances.

“He didn’t seem too bothered about anyone else coming along.” Anna remembered how casual the Death Eater’s manner had been. “If anything I’d say that he was a pretty confident character.”

“He’d already dispatched Harry and Hermione. He also probably thought that Remus wouldn’t offer up any resistance once Remus had realized who’d attacked you, which only left you to deal with.” Dae pointed out. “I suggest from now on that you trust absolutely no-one as you have no idea who Amicus really is. I think I can safely say that he’s not the type to leave unfinished business.”

Anna groaned. “So basically what you’re saying is that, unlike you, he knows very well I’m alive, and that he’ll be looking to finish the job.”

“I’d say that there’s every chance he will.” Dae’s next words made Anna feel uneasy. “The most frightening thing is that if you met him without his mask you wouldn’t know who he was. He could attack you before you even knew what was happening.”

Anna felt a shiver run down her spine that her attacker could be someone she knew. “That’s what you meant about striking terror into the hearts of others, isn’t it?”

“And it works doesn’t it?” Dae had seen the small shudder Anna had given.

Any further discussion was interrupted by a slightly strained looking middle-aged woman who came into the room. “French is looking after Hermione. He felt I needed a break. Hi Harry.”

“Hi Peri.” Harry got up and hugged the woman before sitting back down.

Dae stood up and put an arm around his mother. “Anna, I’d like you to meet my Mum, Peri Flamel. Mum, this is Anna Jameson, a colleague of Remus’.”

Peri shook hands with Anna, who had immediately recognized the woman. “I’m pleased to meet you my dear. Are you alright?”

Anna shrugged. “Honestly, after everything I’ve learnt tonight, I don’t really know.”

Dae grimaced. “She was attacked by Amicus, who for some reason wants her dead.”

“For the most part he’s not what bothers me; well maybe a little.” Anna admitted. “It’s actually the information I learnt about Serenity that was the most distressing for me to hear.”

“But she’s been dead for years. Why bring her up now?” Peri asked.

“She was my mother.” Anna informed the woman.

“I’m so sorry.” Peri pulled the taller woman into her arms. “Just remember that no child can choose their parents.”

Anna was a little surprised at Peri’s compassionate gesture. “It’s just going to take some time to sink in.”

“Mum, would you care for something to drink?” Dae asked, as the two women separated. “I’ve a bottle of wine here that we haven’t opened yet.”

Peri didn't get a chance to respond as, with a loud thump, Remus appeared on the floor close to the guest fireplace. Anna shot across the room and onto her knees. "Remus, can you hear me?"

Remus didn't respond and just moaned. Anna was horrified at the state of his body. "What's wrong with him? What is this stuff?"

Anna reached out and touched the silvery substance that was leaking from the numerous cuts on Remus' body before Harry could shout out a warning. Anna yelped as the substance burned her.

Harry swallowed hard. "Oh Merlin, that's silver nitrate."

Dae knelt down by Remus and quickly assessed the state of his wounds. "I need to get Severus. Stay here with your Dad and Anna."

Knowing that Remus couldn't be comfortable on the hard floor, Anna swung Remus into her arms and carried him across the room before placing him onto a sofa. Anna then stood up, more than aware that the silver nitrate that had transferred from Remus' body onto her clothing, was now seeping through to her skin. Suddenly she found herself completely naked. "What the...?"

At Anna's exclamation, Harry swung round to look at her, only to quickly look away as he noticed her state of undress.

Peri quickly pulled off her outer robe and wrapped it around the woman. "The silver nitrate was on your clothes. I thought it best to get you out of them."

Harry knelt down at the side of the sofa as Remus moaned again. "Why are they taking so long?"

"Dae can't apparate into Hogwarts. He'll have to go on foot." Peri reminded Harry, who in his panic over his Dad, had forgotten.

Anna joined Harry on the floor and gently stroked Remus' hair off his face as his moaning began to become louder. "It'll be okay, Remus."

Harry surprised Anna by roughly shaking his Dad. "Dad, Dad, wake up."

"Harry..." Anna began to protest at Harry's harsh treatment, only for Harry to hold up his hand to shut her up.

"Dad, its Harry. You need to wake up." Harry shook Remus again until Remus' eyelids fluttered and opened.

"Harry?" Remus struggled to speak through the pain.

"Dad, how long ago did they do this to you?" Harry knew from the other Harry's memories that time was of the essence. When Remus didn't answer, Harry gritted his teeth and slapped his Dad as hard as he could. "Dad, you've got to tell me; how long?"

"Few hours." Remus managed to answer the question before he passed into unconsciousness once more, just as Severus and Dae apparated into the room.

Harry swallowed his panic at his Dad's words and passed on what Remus had told him to Severus. "He said they did it a few hours ago. His voice sounds hoarse. I think that they made him swallow it as well."

Severus pulled out a large flagon of clear liquid from the wooden box he had with him. "Somebody hold him down."

Anna pushed Harry out of the way as she and Dae did as Severus asked. As Severus poured the liquid over Remus' wounds, Remus let out a howl and began screaming. Anna thought that Hermione's screams had been awful, but they paled in comparison to Remus'.

"One of you will have to keep his head still. I need to check inside his mouth." Anna did as Severus asked. "It looks as though Harry's right. I'm going to have to pour some of this down his throat."

Anna had to use all of her strength to hold Remus down. Even though he appeared unconscious, he was now trying to fight them. "Just do it quickly. I can't hold him forever."

Harry couldn't bear to watch and turned to Peri, who pulled him close to her, wandlessly casting a silencing spell around the two of them. "You don't need to hear this."

Only once she could see that Remus had stopped contorting and screaming, did she drop the spell. Harry walked back over to where Remus was lying. "What did you give him?"

"An antidote to the silver nitrate. Being a werewolf both the problem and the cure are extremely painful." Severus spotted the burn on Anna's hand as she put her arm around Harry. "I'm going to need to treat that. I'm sorry but it's going to be painful, and I can't give you anything for the pain as the potion would interfere with the effectiveness of the antidote."

Anna swallowed hard. "I've got some burns on my body as well." She flushed. "I'm actually naked under the robe."

Severus hesitated, before passing the flagon to Peri. "I'm afraid that as the only woman here, you'll have to do this."

Anna turned her back to the group as Peri pulled open her robe. "Are you ready?"

Anna gritted her teeth. "Go ahead." She was soon wishing that she'd refused as Anna had never known such pain before. Despite biting through her own lip in an effort to keep quiet, she soon began screaming until she felt as if she couldn't breathe. A few moments later she began to pass into unconsciousness.

Peri called out to her son. "Dae."

Dae swung round and caught Anna just before she hit the floor. He winced at the sight of the burn marks that covered her stomach and breasts. "I'll put her in the room next to Hermione."

"Don't cover her burns." Severus warned. "If you do, they may become infected."

Dae kept his eyes averted as he carried his burden into the second guest bedroom. But in trying to keep his eyes on her face, Dae spotted a mark very similar to one he himself carried. He knew immediately that Anna too wasn't who she appeared to be. Gently lying her down on the bed he was about to leave when Anna groaned and opened her eyes. "Harry?"

Dae kept his back to Anna. "It's Dae. You fainted. Severus said not to cover your wounds; they might become infected."

Anna blushed as she realized that Dae must have seen her naked when he'd carried her in. "Thank you."

Dae waved off her thanks. "I'll let you get some sleep."

Anna tried to smile. "I don't see that happening any time soon."

Dae re-entered the sitting room to find Harry talking quietly with Severus. "What are his chances?"

"Right now, I'd say fifty-fifty." Severus kept his hand on Harry's shoulder. "Only time will tell."

Harry looked at his Dad. "I can't believe how similar his injuries are to the Remus from the alternate timeline."

"It's uncanny isn't it?" Severus remarked. "At least I didn't have to use the killing curse on him."

Even though Severus left the word 'yet' off the end of his sentence, Harry was more than aware that it might still come to that. Sliding onto the floor, Harry sat down to wait.

Next chapter: We get to meet alternate Luna; Harry discovers his animagus form; we get to see a more unpleasant side of Lily; Severus gets some news about Dominic Rosier.

The next chapter should hopefully be posted by Tuesday; I've already got quite a bit of it written.

Chapter 39: A Moment in Time

Harry could hear voices talking quietly, and he opened his eyes to find his Dad and Dae staring back at him. "Dad, thank goodness."

Dae grabbed Harry just in time to stop him from throwing himself on Remus. "You can't touch him yet. However, he should be back on his feet by the end of the day."

"Harry, are you alright?" Remus knew from Dae that Amicus hadn't hurt Harry, but he still had to check.

"I'm fine, Dad. Amicus just put me to sleep. I presume he did this to you?" Harry swept his hand over Remus' chest.

Remus grimaced. "He said it was a lesson in obedience."

"I'd hardly call it a lesson; he nearly killed you." Harry pointed out.

"And I'm quite sure he would have if the Dark Lord hadn't stopped him." Remus had barely been conscious, however, by the time he had. "Where are Anna and Hermione? Dae was just about to tell me when you woke up."

"Anna's sleeping; she got silver nitrate on her clothes from picking you up, and had to be treated with the antidote." Harry watched as Remus winced at the news.

Severus chose that moment to reveal that he too was awake. "Hermione, however, was hit by a form the slow death curse. Luckily Dae recognized it, and she was treated in time."

Remus was stunned. "Why attack Hermione like that, and just put Harry to sleep?"

"Harry's a fellow Death Eater's son whereas Hermione is the daughter of a traitor." Dae smiled apologetically at Severus. "The Dark Lord obviously wanted to leave Severus a message."

Remus reached into his pocket, pulled out a crumpled letter, and passed it to Severus. "Speaking of messages, this is for you."

Severus read the letter before crushing it in his hand. "The Dark Lord wants me to complete my initiation. He must be mad if he thinks I'd accept after what he did to Hermione."

"Anna was the one Amicus was after. I think Hermione was just in the wrong place at the wrong time." Remus postulated. "However, if Amicus had intended to attack Hermione, then I believe it was a warning for you. If that is the case, then the Dark Lord is serious about wanting you back."

Severus frowned. "I don't see why he would want me back. He's renowned for his dislike of those who have betrayed him."

"Perhaps he wants your skills as a potions master." Harry suggested.

Remus agreed with his son. "I think Harry's got a good point. Your work is renowned throughout the potions community. Who better than a master like yourself to create potions for him?"

"Quite true." Severus sighed. "Don't tell me; if I refuse it's going to be back to the original plan."

"It is; the only difference now is that I'm to do it at the next full moon and not wait until the end of the school year." Remus hated that he could be used against his friends in such a manner.

"So be it then. I haven't spent all this time under Dumbledore's thumb only to change masters now that the Dark Lord has threatened me." Severus looked apologetically at Remus. "I'm sorry, Remus."

Remus wasn't surprised by Severus' response. "I might not like it, but I understand."

Unlike Remus, Harry, however, didn't. "Dad, do you really have to do it?"

Remus confirmed Harry's question. "I do. I hate what I've got to do to Severus but I'm going to do it anyway." Remus frowned at Harry's scowl. "Harry, I'm the only connection with the Dark Lord we can trust. I can't blow my cover for the sake of one man."

"But you risked your cover yesterday evening to save us." Harry pointed out.

"No, I didn't." Remus pushed himself slightly up the sofa as he was speaking. "My ring only becomes visible once it's activated. Amicus wouldn't have been able to see me dropping it onto Anna. I also made sure to only whisper the password."

Harry's face fell. "So you'd have left us to die if you hadn't been wearing your ring?"

"Amicus didn't want you dead." Remus reminded Harry.

Harry felt sick. "And what about Hermione?"

Severus saved Remus from having to respond. "Harry, nothing is more important than the information Remus can provide us with."

Harry remembered his conversation with Remus about how little information he'd been able to glean previously. "But I thought the Dark Lord didn't trust Dad that much."

"That may be so, but he still has access to more information than anyone else we know." Severus argued. "Without him, countless others might have to die unnecessarily. We can't allow personal feelings to get in the way of what Remus might be able to do."

"So you'd let Hermione die as well?" Harry backed away from his Professor.

Severus decided to put a stop to the conversation before it got out of hand. "Harry, you weren't around during the first war with Voldemort; you have no idea what it was like. People were frightened of their own families; you never knew who might betray you."

"But what's that got to do with leaving Hermione to die?" Harry didn't want to believe that Severus would sacrifice his own daughter.

"After I revealed to Hermione about what I'd nearly become, we've talked about what might happen if the Dark Lord was ever to return. Hermione's more than aware that she might become a casualty because of me." Severus admitted. "I'd give up my life in an instant for my daughter but I can't ask Remus to do the same. What's he doing is too important. He's already stupidly risked himself once."

Harry didn't agree. "But he didn't risk himself; he knew that Amicus couldn't detect what he was doing."

Dae opened his mouth only for Remus to shake his head. Dae ignored him. "Harry, Remus' injuries are only so bad because Amicus is no fool. He might not have been able to see Remus' ring, but Amicus did spot Remus pulling something from his finger."

Harry looked at his Dad. "Is this true?"

Remus knew that if he didn't tell Harry, then Dae would. "Yes. Amicus guessed I'd activated a portkey. When he asked me why, I told him that I couldn't let you die."

Harry slumped down onto the floor next to the sofa where Remus was lying. "You went through all this for me?"

"Not just for you." Remus hoped Harry wouldn't blow up when he told him. "After Amicus had tortured me for a while for interfering, I was told I'd have to complete his failed mission. When I refused, that's when Amicus poured the silver nitrate down my throat."

Harry could feel himself shaking. "You nearly died because of Anna. Do you still love her that much?"

"I've never loved Anna, but I do care about her." Remus answered softly. "The only reason Amicus used the silver nitrate and didn't kill me outright, is because I told him I owed Anna a life debt for saving you from the Dementor attack. Even he is bound to honor such a debt."

If Anna hadn't been owed such a debt, then I would probably have to kill her now."

"Thanks for the ego boost." Anna walked into the room. "Would anyone like to tell me what's been going on since I went to bed?"

After being filled in, Anna knelt down in front of Harry. "Severus and Dae are right. Remus' position is far too important to give up for just one person, whether that person is you, me or Hermione."

It was all too much for Harry, and he got up. "Will you all excuse me?" He then turned and fled out of the room.

Anna went to follow, only for Remus to grab her wrist. "Give him a little time alone."

Anna reluctantly did as Remus asked. "Okay."

Dae sat down before addressing Remus. "I think you should fill Anna in on why Amicus wants her dead."

Remus did as Dae suggested. "The Defense position was cursed by the Dark Lord. As you're probably already aware, the professors who take it never last more than one year. As the Dark Lord refuses to lift the curse, and I've already served my year, he needed a different position for me to move into. I'm to monitor Dumbledore and report back to him."

Anna was staggered. "So Amicus came after me over a school position?"

"I'm afraid so." Remus could see that she was shaken by the news.

Anna frowned as she realized something. "If You-Know-Who wants you to spy on Dumbledore, and you've now refused to kill me, then I take it you've got to kill someone else instead?"

Remus confirmed her suspicions. "I do. It doesn't matter who, as long as there's another spot for me to fill."

"You're going to replace Binns aren't you?" Severus deduced. He knew that Remus wasn't likely to attempt to kill any of the other teachers, unless he really had to.

Remus nodded. "He's the best option. As much as I'd like to dispose of one or two of my other bigoted colleagues, Binns' position is perfect for me to take over."

Dae shook his head. "The Dark Lord will punish you for it, you know. He expects you to kill a flesh and blood teacher, not exorcise a ghost."

"Probably, but I'm only following orders." Remus didn't look too concerned. "Besides, I've a got a history degree and it makes me the ideal candidate for Binns' job."

Harry chose that moment to come back into the room. All the adults could see that he'd been crying. Harry walked over to Remus and took his hand. "I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time."

Remus squeezed Harry's hand back. "What we've said can't have been easy for you to hear."

Harry swallowed. "It wasn't." Harry turned to Severus. "Professor, can I speak openly?"

Severus wondered where Harry was going with his request. "Of course."

"I think you're a selfish bastard." Harry calmly informed Severus.

Remus was horrified at Harry's comment. "Harry, what...?"

Severus interrupted him. "No, Remus. Let him say what he needs to."

Harry did just that. "You're going to make my Dad bite you; to turn you into something he hates, when you could easily accept the Dark Lord's invitation."

Remus objected. "You have no idea of what you're asking Severus to do."

Harry disagreed with his Dad and calmly stared up at Severus. "But I do. Hermione and all of your family would be a lot safer if you took him up on his offer. Dad wouldn't have to bite you, and, most importantly, we'd have a second spy in the Dark Lord's camp."

"I can't do it Harry." Severus understood Harry's point of view. "I can't go from serving one master to serving another."

"Dad's doing it." Harry pointed out.

"That may be so, but your Dad's not capable of killing hundreds of people with a single potion. I am, and the Dark Lord knows it." Severus put a hand on Harry's shoulder and looked him in the eye. "I know you think I'm being a coward, but I'm not. If any of the potions I know I'm capable of brewing were to fall into the Dark Lord's hands, it would be disastrous."

Harry had an answer to Severus' argument. "But you'd be in a good position to sabotage any potions that he wants making."

"The Dark Lord knows Severus is a master at potions making. He's probably the most published potions master of this decade." Dae knew that Harry wasn't thinking rationally. "Whereas Severus can fool Dumbledore because Dumbledore can't get access to some of the necessary ingredients to make dangerous potions for Dumbledore, he can't use the same excuse with the Dark Lord."

Harry didn't understand. "Why not?"

Remus filled him in. "When the Dark Lord was at the height of his power he had access to almost unlimited funds and rare ingredients through some of his Death Eaters. I'm sure that once he announces his return the situation will be no different. The Dark Lord will once again have the power to gain access to any potions ingredients he needs; Severus wouldn't be allowed to use the same loophole as he has with Dumbledore. Harry, Severus can't be allowed to join the Dark Lord, even if it means I have to turn him."

Harry knew he had to accept what he was being told. "I didn't think about it like that."

Severus pulled Harry into his arms. "I'm sorry, Harry. If the answer had been as simple as joining the Dark Lord to protect my family, then I would have. But as we've been trying to explain to you, there's more at stake here than our personal lives."

Harry could feel tears welling up again. "I'm sorry too. I really hate this."

Severus pushed Harry gently away so he could look down at him. "We all do."

Harry smiled tremulously at Severus. "I'm sorry I was so rude to you."

"It's okay, Harry. I'd have done the same thing in your shoes." Severus knew that Harry's outburst had stemmed from his concern for his Dad and Hermione.

Harry pulled away and walked over to Remus. "I'm sorry, Dad. I didn't think about the whole picture; just how it affected you and Hermione."

"I know, Harry." Remus grinned at his son. "I did the same with you guys yesterday evening and look at the treat it got me."

Harry tried to laugh and burst into tears instead. Anna got up and pulled him over to sit by her on the sofa. As she ran her hand over Harry's head, Severus noticed something. "Your hand's already healed."

Anna nodded. "It was fine by the time I woke up this morning."

Severus looked pointedly at Anna's stomach. "How about your other wounds?"

"You can take my word for it that they're healing well." Anna had no intention of showing Severus, or anyone else, her midriff again.

Severus looked excited. "Your metabolism is even faster than Remus'. Do you have any idea why?"

"I'm afraid I don't. I've always been a quick healer." Anna had just taken her swift metabolism for granted.

"You've got an idea about something, haven't you?" Remus could see from Severus' animated expression that he'd had a revelation of some sort.

Severus' answer was delayed as the fireplace in the entry nook flared up, and a red-headed woman moved gracefully out of it, followed by Dae's brother. Seeing Lily enter the room, Dae swiftly threw up a glamour over Remus' arm.

"Maman, what are you doing here?" Harry didn't move from the comfort of Anna's arms.

Lily frowned at the sight of an obviously upset Harry being comforted by a mystery brunette, before answering. "Leo told me that you'd been hurt. He said his mother had dropped by and told him. I wanted to make sure for myself that everyone was okay."

Severus came forward. "Lily, it's nice to see you again."

Lily kissed him on the cheek. "You too, Severus."

Dae, not bothering to move from Remus' side, simply raised a hand. "Hi, Lils."

"Dae." Lily smiled back at her co-worker.

Severus led Lily over to where Anna was seated with Harry. "Lily Black, I'd like you to meet Anna Jameson, Harry's Muggle Studies professor."

Lily nodded coolly. She knew from Remus' conversation that this was the woman who had caused the latest discord between Remus and Harry. "Professor Jameson."

Anna felt as if the temperature in the room had dropped ten degrees. "Lady Black."

Lily walked away to stand back next to Leo. Harry frowned. He didn't know why Lily had been so hostile towards Anna.

Remus beckoned to Lily. "Lily, can we have a moment?"

On reaching Remus' side, Lily invoked a privacy spell, and, not giving Remus a chance to say anything, launched into a diatribe against him. "What the hell is she doing here? You've already said that it was because of her that you and Harry were having problems again."

"She saved your son's life; that's why she's here." Remus informed her. "And it's not her fault that Harry and I have been having problems. She was just the catalyst in our latest disagreement. If you're going to be pissed at anyone, then it should be me. Anna and Harry have worked out their differences, and have managed to rebuild their former relationship."

Lily still wasn't satisfied. "If that's the case, then why is Harry so upset?"

"It was only yesterday that he saw his friend being attacked. He also had to watch as I was treated for silver nitrate poisoning. Why do you think he's so upset?" Remus asked sarcastically.

"After what you'd told me, I thought she'd upset him again. What else did you expect me to think?" Lily snapped back.

Remus could feel his temper beginning to flare. "I actually thought your first concern would be about Harry's safety rather than the reason for Anna's presence. However, from the way you just behaved, I'd say that I was probably wrong about that. I suggest that you might like to try and be more polite to the woman who saved your son's life."

Lily knew that her own animosity towards Anna resulted from knowing that the woman had spent more time with her son when he was growing up than she had. She was more than a little afraid that Harry

might care more about Anna than he did about her. Seeing Harry snuggled up to Anna on the sofa, while the woman comforted him, had only succeeded in further igniting those fears. "Fair enough."

Not wanting to give Remus the opportunity to say anything else, Lily dropped the spell and turned to face Anna. "Remus tells me you saved Harry's life, Anna. Thank you."

Anna smiled graciously. "I'm glad I could help." She knew that Remus must have read Lily the riot act for her to perform such a turnaround in the space of a few moments.

Harry relaxed as Remus winked at him. Leo decided to lighten things up. "Don't I get an introduction?"

Dae waved his hand towards Leo. "Everyone this is Leo. Leo, this is everyone."

The tension dissipated as everyone laughed at the brothers' antics.

Severus walked over to Anna. "Would you mind if I took some blood off you?"

Guessing why, Anna acquiesced. "Go ahead."

Severus then turned to Remus, who'd heard what Severus had said. "You too."

Lily watched puzzled. "What's going on?"

After seeing Remus shake his head almost imperceptibly at Dae, Harry decided to improvise. "As you probably know, we were all attacked on our way back from Hogsmeade."

At Lily's nod, Harry continued. "Someone attacked Dad with silver nitrate and Anna had to pick him up. They both got burned but for some reason Anna's wounds healed faster than Dad's. Professor Snape thinks that Anna might be able to help with Dad's condition."

Lily looked at Anna with interest. "You're a werewolf as well?"

Anna shook her head. "I just have a very fast metabolism."

Lily watched as Severus took blood from himself as well. "Why are you taking your own blood?"

"I need a control." Severus lied.

Nic and Peri apparated into the room right behind Harry, startling him. "This is quite the gathering." Nic glanced around the group. "Is there something we're missing?"

Remus took point. "Severus is trying to find out why Anna's metabolism is faster than my own."

Peri stepped away from her husband. "I don't see how that can be. Nobody heals faster than you, unless...?" Showing more discretion than Lily had about Remus' condition, Peri looked pointedly at Anna.

Anna shook her head and held out her hand. "I'm not. Take a look though."

Peri was amazed. "I've never seen anyone heal this quickly before."

Anna shrugged. "What can I say? I'm just amazing."

Not realizing that she was being watched by her son, Lily pulled a face at Anna's comment.

"Maman, can you come here?" Harry dragged Lily over to the small nook by the fireplace so they could have some privacy. "Why don't you like Anna?"

Lily refuted Harry's claim. "Harry, it's not that I don't like her, it's just..." Lily's voice trailed off as she searched for the right words.

"It's just what, Maman?" Harry's tone bordered on insolent, but after the morning he'd had so far, he couldn't cope with Lily's unfriendliness towards Anna.

Lily frowned at Harry's manner. "Remus told me that you found out about them, and that you were upset with both of them about it."

"And did Dad also tell you that it's now all been sorted out?" Harry had never seen this side to Lily before, and he didn't like what he was seeing.

Lily ran a hand over Harry's cheek. "That may be so, but knowing what that woman did to you and to Nia, it's very hard for me to warm towards her."

"She wasn't alone in doing what she did. Dad was a willing party too. However, I don't see you being so impolite to him." Harry complained.

"I've already had Remus point that out to me." Lily tried, and failed, to keep her irritation at being dressed down by both her son and his father, out of her voice.

Harry had had enough. "If you can't be nice to her, then maybe you should go."

Lily now knew her worst fears about Anna were probably correct, and not wanting to alienate Harry, Lily pasted a smile onto her face. "I was just concerned about you. I'm sorry, Harry. I'll try and be nicer to her."

Harry didn't really believe Lily but not wanting to prolong the discussion, he simply nodded at Lily. "Thanks." He then turned to go back into the room, only for Lily to stop him. "Who attacked you, Harry? Leo didn't say."

Harry answered truthfully. "I didn't see his face."

Lily narrowed her eyes as something suddenly clicked. "You said that the attacker used silver nitrate to hurt Remus and Anna?"

Harry nodded. "Dad was attacked, and Anna got the silver nitrate on her helping him."

"How did your attacker know Remus was a werewolf?" Lily watched Harry's face drop as the realization that he'd slipped up sank in.

"I don't know." Harry didn't look at Lily as he answered her question.

Lily felt like a player in a game where everyone else knew the rules except her. "I think there's more going on here than everyone's telling me."

Harry knew Remus didn't want Lily to know about him, and denied Lily's accusation. "I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do." Lily pushed. "But seeing as you obviously don't want to share, I'll speak to someone who might." Determined to find out what was going on, Lily promptly marched across the room, and threw up a privacy bubble around her and Remus.

Dae watched as the privacy bubble settled around the couple. He promptly threw up on one of his own around him and Leo. "What the hell were you thinking by bringing Lily here?"

"She was upset about Harry." Leo defended his actions. "What was I supposed to do? Say I'll go check on him but you can't come with me?"

"You shouldn't have said anything." Dae was angry with his brother. "She obviously has a problem with Anna and, judging from the look on Harry's face, she's upset him as well."

Leo turned to look at Harry who was now cuddled up to Anna again. "Well he's probably not going to help matters with Lily if he sits like that with his teacher."

"And why shouldn't he? She was his nanny for years." Dae snapped. "He's probably closer to her than he'll ever be to Lily."

"I expect that's probably what's bothering Lily." Leo defended Lily, before realizing something. "Hold on. Anna's the nanny Remus slept with?"

Dae nodded. "I spoke to Harry last night while we were watching Remus. Anna felt so bad about what she'd done to Harry's mum, she

gave up the life she'd built and fled. It was just chance that she ended up at Hogwarts. Harry only found out who she really was a few months ago which was when he also found out that Remus had slept with her. Now Harry has had to deal with his Dad being attacked, and the repercussions that stem from that."

"What repercussions?" Leo didn't know about the Dark Lord's request.

"The Dark Lord wants Severus back; Remus still has to turn him if he doesn't. Harry objected when Severus refused. They've sorted it out, but I think Harry's feeling a little fragile right now. He doesn't need Lily's shit on top of everything else." Dae had come to care a great deal for the young boy who was currently going through the wringer.

"What a mess." Leo ran his hand through his hair. "Look, I'm sorry I brought Lily here, but I couldn't bear to see her so upset."

Dae couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Please don't tell me you think you're still in love with her?"

It was now Leo's turn to get annoyed. "I don't think; I know."

"But you hardly ever see her except for the odd weekend." Dae couldn't believe that Leo hadn't gotten over Lily yet.

"It doesn't make any difference." Leo bristled.

Dae suddenly realized something. "That's why Lily's been working all these weekends isn't it?"

Leo reddened under his brother's gaze. "If you must know, then yes."

"For heaven's sake, Leo, get a grip." Dae was astounded at his brother's lack of judgment. "She's a happily married woman. It's never going to happen."

Fed up with his brother's censure, Leo scowled. "I think it's time you shut up. My feelings about Lily are none of your business anyway, and they have nothing to do with Harry and what is happening here."

“Leo, you brought her here because she was upset about Harry.” Dae pointed out.

“I don’t want to fall out with you about Lily, Dae, so as I just said, I think you should shut up about her.” Leo threatened.

Not wanting to get into a full blown argument over a woman, Dae yielded to his brother’s request. “Fine. However, your feelings aside, you still shouldn’t have brought her here.”

“Do you want me to oblivate Lily when she’s finished talking to Remus?” Leo knew Dae was right. He had let his feelings get in the way but he knew he’d probably do it again if it came down to it.

Dae shrugged. “I don’t know. I’m going to leave it up to Remus.” With that he dropped the bubble and waited for Lily to finish talking with Remus.

A few minutes later, a white-faced Lily emerged from the bubble.

Dae called for French. “Can you get Lily some water?”

French didn’t answer and returned with the glass for Lily before bowing and leaving.

Leo walked up to Remus and whispered in his ear, only for Remus to shake his head.

After getting over her initial shock, Lily looked accusingly at Harry. “You knew what Remus was and you didn’t tell me?”

Anna tightened her arm around Harry, and answered Lily before anyone else could. “I think Harry’s gone through enough, Lady Black. He doesn’t need you condemning him because he didn’t blab someone else’s secrets to you.”

Harry had finally taken all he was going to, and stood up. “Maman, if you’re going to keep on attacking everyone, then I think its best you leave.”

Lily felt tears well up in her eyes at Harry's hard tone. "I'm sorry, Harry. It's just that finding out about Remus came at the worst possible time."

"What do you mean?" Harry was a sucker for tears.

"It doesn't matter." Lily wiped her eyes and started to head towards the fireplace, only for Harry to stop her before she could step into it.

"What's wrong?" Harry asked.

Lily bit back a sob. "It's really silly compared to everything that's happened here."

Peri got up and patted her on the arm. "Just because your problems don't seem as dreadful as ours, it doesn't mean that they're not as important to you."

Peri's kindness undid Lily, and she let out the sob she'd been trying to hold back before trying to regain her composure. "It's just that work is so overwhelming at the moment. I always feel as if I'm never home."

Leo felt a shaft of guilt. "That's my fault. We'll sort something out when we get back to work."

Lily gave him a faint smile before continuing. "When I am at home, my eldest daughter, Anna, keeps on picking on the other two children; she's actually becoming quite cruel. Sirius is never there as he's always lecturing or there's some sort of emergency he's needed at, so he doesn't get to see what's happening. When I told him, he put it down to typical childhood squabbling. He said I should never have taken the Ministry job in the first place, and that if I hadn't she probably wouldn't be behaving in the way that she's been doing."

Remus frowned. "But you two seemed fine the last time I saw you together."

Lily sighed. "We are usually but lately our relationship isn't as good as it could be. Sirius never wanted me to take the job at the Ministry, but

I thought that he'd gotten over it. But with the extra hours I've been putting in, it's become a bone of contention between us."

"Why don't you give up the job?" Harry asked. "You could easily get a position somewhere else."

"I love my job." Lily explained. "I don't really want give it up until I have to but I've told Sirius I'll happily give it up when I become pregnant again."

Harry grinned. "You're trying for another baby?"

Lily blushed slightly. "We are, but with Anna's behavior I'm beginning to wonder if I'm making a mistake. I don't know how she'd deal with a new addition to the family."

"It's that bad?" Remus could see Lily was genuinely concerned by her daughter's behavior.

Lily wiped away a stray tear that was making its way down her cheek. "Anna actually burnt her sister this morning and I'm sure it was deliberate, even though she denied it. She told me she hated me when I grounded her. I had to leave things unresolved because I had to go to work. Just before I left I found out that I wasn't pregnant, which was a big disappointment. On arriving at work, I learned that Harry had been attacked which was pretty much the last straw." She looked apologetically at Anna. "I apologize about how I behaved towards you but seeing Harry so upset when I arrived, and believing you to be the cause, it felt as if the world had finally caved in around me."

Anna smiled wryly at Lily. "I know how that feels."

"I wish Sirius was here now." Lily really wanted her husband's support after what she'd learnt. "But he'd probably just say I'd brought it all upon myself. I really don't know what to do."

Harry squeezed Lily tightly before letting her go. "It'll be alright. Anna just needs a good spanking."

“Who me?” Anna joked, trying to lift the mood a little.

Lily smiled shakily at Anna. “It’s a little confusing with two Anna’s isn’t it?”

“It is.” Harry answered in Anna’s stead. “However, I still think my sister needs a good paddling. She might think twice then about misbehaving.”

Lily shook her head. “It will never happen. Sirius doesn’t have any qualms about spanking the boys, but he won’t raise a hand to any of the girls.”

Harry couldn’t remember his Dad ever spanking any of them. “Dad won’t either. Actually, he’s never spanked Dudley or me either.”

“I think threatening to do it was enough to keep you in line.” Remus informed his son. “You’ve only ever tempted me once, but you can be thankful that Anna was in the room at the time.”

“I think I’m going to change the subject.” Harry cringed as he thought about how close he’d come to it, and he turned to Lily. “Maman, why don’t you talk to Sirius about what’s happened when you get back tonight? Perhaps it might help smooth things over if he understands how much pressure you feel as if you’re under.”

Remus interrupted. “She can’t tell him about me.”

Harry was puzzled. “Why not? I thought you and Sirius were really good friends again now.”

Lily backed Harry up. “Harry’s right. I’m sure Sirius would understand if you explained it to him.”

Remus shook his head. “I don’t think so.” Seeing Harry’s frown, Remus explained. “Sirius had a brother, Regulus. You’ve probably heard me mention him once or twice.” At Harry’s nod, Remus continued. “Regulus was a Death Eater. A short time after joining the Dark Lord, Regulus realized he’d made a mistake and he went to Sirius for help. Sirius refused to help him get out. If Sirius wouldn’t

forgive his own brother, then I know he'd never forgive me, despite the fact that I have a good excuse."

Lily was aware that Remus was right about Sirius' refusal. She could still remember the disgust on Sirius' face when he'd told her about his brother. "Don't worry; I won't say anything."

"We can deal with that before you leave." Leo informed Lily quietly. He was still reeling over Lily's news that she and Sirius were trying for a baby.

Dae knew that Leo had been shocked by Lily's announcement and moved to stand next to his brother in quiet support. "I think we should all have a drink and sit down." Leo smiled gratefully at Dae before sitting as far away from Lily as he could.

Once everyone had their drink of choice, Peri asked about the blood that Severus had collected. "So why do you have those phials of blood, Severus?"

"The Dark Lord has offered me the chance to complete my initiation. However, as I'm going to refuse, Remus here is supposed to bite and turn me on the night of the next full moon. I'm hoping I might be able to synthesize whatever gives Anna her enhanced metabolism and her abilities, so that I can fool the Dark Lord into thinking I've been changed." Severus explained.

Lily wasn't entirely shocked at the news about Severus almost becoming a Death Eater as she'd known he'd hung around with the wrong crowd when he was at school. Pushing aside any questions she had for him on the subject, she focused instead on the task ahead. "So how are you planning to utilize the blood, and do you need any help?"

"I'm hoping to make a potion which should hopefully pass Anna's abilities on to me. I've just got one problem. I think I might need two or three months to make the potion, and I'm also not totally sure of what I'm doing as this is new ground." Severus admitted. "So any help anyone can offer will be gratefully received."

Lily looked excited. "I'll be happy to help. Charms might be my specialty but I'm pretty handy around a cauldron as well."

"I will also assist you." Nic reassured Severus. "In addition I may just have an answer to your timing problem."

Severus looked at Nic with interest. "Is this related to your job?"

Nic nodded. "We have in the Department of Mysteries, a device that freezes time. Being who I am, I've got no problem 'borrowing' it for a while."

"But if I'm frozen, how I can work on my problem?" Severus pointed out.

"It doesn't exactly freeze time; it actually slows it down to a crawl. For every ten minutes that pass in the world outside the area encompassed by the device, one day passes inside." Nic explained. "However, once twenty-four hours goes by, the device fails. It then takes the same one hundred and forty-four days you spend inside the device's area, to recharge itself again. We don't know who made it but we've been able to determine that it contains the same type of sand as our time-turners."

Lily was glad she hadn't left as she was intrigued by the device. "But I thought the sand from the time-turners only allowed people to travel back in time."

"That's what we thought too until we discovered this device." Nic told her. "Before any of you decide on whether you want to do this, there are a few things you should know first. Once you are in the area generated by the device, you can't leave until the cycle has finished. If you try to, it will kill you. It will also only encompass a room not much bigger than the one we're in. Finally, if you decide you don't want to participate, then I'm afraid I'm going to have to obliterate any knowledge of this conversation before you leave."

Dae made up his mind there and then. "French." The small house elf appeared. "Yes, Master Dae?"

"I need you to change this room to sleep..." Dae hesitated as he looked around for confirmation. Everyone wanted in, including Lily. "Make it four bedrooms; one for you, one for the ladies, one for the men and the last one for my parents."

Suddenly the familiarity Nic and Peri had with Dae and Leo made sense to Lily. She'd known that Nic and Peri worked for the Ministry but she'd had no idea in exactly what capacity or as to their relationship with Dae and Leo. She listened as Dae continued with his instructions to French.

"We'll also need a small kitchen and a couple of bathrooms. In addition you'll need to get enough food to last for five months. The most important room is a small lab. Severus and Dad will tell you what they need in it. Finally, can you fetch Harry and Hermione's school things, and some clothes for them and everyone else here?" Dae turned his Dad. "How long before you can fetch the device?"

"I'll be back in a few hours." Nic informed him, before apparating out.

"Severus, I'll need you to inform Minerva that Remus, Anna and the children won't be returning to school until Tuesday as they are all unfit to travel. Explain that you will be staying with them as they need treating. I'll leave it up to you to make something up if necessary." Dae finally turned to Leo. "You need to get back as we need someone to cover for us at work."

Leo acknowledged Dae's comment before turning to Severus. "Before you go, can we have a few minutes; I've got some news for you about a person of mutual interest."

"I'll floo back to Diagon Alley with you. We can talk there." Severus didn't want to discuss Dominic Rosier and his connection with Virginie in front of the others. He headed for the floo before disappearing, followed shortly afterwards by Leo.

Dae turned to everyone who hadn't left. "Let's go into the sunroom while French gets this place ready."

A few hours later everyone was assembled in the now considerably downsized sitting room. Hermione, however, was sleeping peacefully in the ladies' bedroom. "Let's do this." Nic switched on the device and everyone felt as if they'd suddenly come to an abrupt halt before being released. "That's it. We're stuck now for the next four and a half months."

Remus suddenly swore under his breath. "We forgot something. Won't I change?"

Nic shook his head. "As far as your body is concerned, only one day will pass. I'd already taken that into consideration when allowing you to stay."

Remus let out a sigh of relief. "I can't believe I forgot."

"How long before Hermione can get up?" Harry was worried about how pale his friend had looked when she'd been carried into the bedroom.

"She'll be unconscious for some time." Dae told him before facing the others. "I suggest everyone make themselves at home."

Five weeks later

Harry looked up from his book as he heard yet another mug hit the wall. He cringed; Lily wasn't coping well with her captivity. Remus came storming in. "I'm going to do something I'm going to regret if she doesn't stop throwing things at me."

Peri smiled. "She's just got a little cabin fever, that's all. Let me go speak to her." Peri left the room in search of Lily.

Remus walked off. "I'm going to my room."

Harry put down his book and followed his Dad, leaving Dae alone in the sitting room. Hermione was in the lab, busy watching her father, Anna and Nic at work. "Are you alright, Dad?"

Remus shook his head. "I've had enough of Lily blaming me for being shut up here. She didn't have to stay. I wish I'd let Leo or Nic oblivate her now."

Harry knew how easy-going his Dad generally was, and that Lily must be really getting to him. "I don't think she handles confinement well. I'd hate to think how James Potter coped with her."

Remus grinned ruefully. "He must have had the patience of a saint. Look Harry, I'll be okay. I just need a few minutes of quiet time alone."

Harry understood that his Dad wanted him to leave. "I'll see you later then."

Remus let out a breath as Harry closed the door behind him, and Remus lay back on the bed, grateful for the solitude the room provided. However, just a few moments later a knock at the door disturbed Remus' reverie. "Come in."

Anna stuck her head around the door. "Sorry to disturb you. Harry said you were trying to get some downtime but we could do with some more of your blood. The latest potion just blew up on us."

"Come in." Remus sat up.

"Is everything okay?" Anna thought Remus looked tired.

"To be honest, Lily's driving me to distraction." Remus admitted.

"I suppose it's the close quarters. It must be difficult for you spending all this time with her and not being able to tell her how you really feel." Remus had admitted to Anna that he was still in love with Harry's birth mother when they had shared a dinner together at Hogwarts.

Remus burst out laughing. "When I say she's driving me to distraction, I don't mean it in a nice way!" He then shook his head. "I can't believe that I ever thought that I was still in love with her. I can deal with her in small doses, but being around her all the time in such an enclosed space is enough to drive me to commit murder."

Anna laughed at Remus' disgruntled look. "I wish I had a camera."

Remus stuck out his tongue at her. "I'll bet you do."

Anna grabbed his hand and pulled him off the bed. "Come on Mr. Epiphany. After we get some of your blood, French is going to serve lunch. It's your favorite, chicken and bacon pasta salad."

Remus felt his mouth start to water. "Let's go then."

Remus watched as Anna dropped his hand and walked out of the room in front of him. In comparison to him and Lily, the two of them had now forged a strong friendship, and he was grateful for her quiet words of comfort when the two of them were alone. He was more than aware that it was Anna who was getting him through having to stay here.

A few days later

Anna strolled into the sitting room to find Dae still up. "I should have guessed you'd still be up."

"I'm not really tired." Dae moved from the prone position he'd been in on the sofa to allow Anna to sit down beside him. "Do you want a nightcap?"

Anna nodded. "I may as well. I've been tossing and turning for the last hour." She smiled as French appeared with a glass of Baileys Irish Cream for her. "You're the best."

French grinned at Anna. "Thank you, Miss Anna. If that will be all, I'll be off to bed."

Dae smiled at his house elf. "I take it these are the self-replenishing glasses?"

French bowed his head. "Of course. Goodnight both."

They both wished French a goodnight and the house elf departed for his little bedroom off the kitchen. He'd refused to have a bedroom next to everyone else.

"So what exciting tales of the bedroom do you have to tell me?" Dae waggled his eyebrows at Anna, making her laugh.

She giggled. "The same as usual. Lily still snores like a chainsaw, and Hermione is always up scribbling in that notebook of hers. Apart from that, there's not much to tell really. You?"

"Harry's still spending half of his nights tossing and turning while he's dreaming; Remus continues to sleep like the dead, and Severus is just like his daughter." Dae chuckled. "And then there's us; the resident insomniacs."

"It always seems to come down to us sitting up here into the wee hours, doesn't it?" Anna sipped her drink and sat back against the sofa. Since they'd began the research, she and Dae had spent most of the nights talking together when everyone else was asleep.

"Somebody's got to do it." Dae swirled his bourbon around the glass. "I've really got a taste for this. I should blame Dad really; he discovered it on a trip to the States."

"Nic really is well traveled isn't he?" Anna had been surprised to find that Nic and Peri had taken many Muggle trips all over the world.

"He's had a lot of time on his hands. He said he's grateful that Muggle transportation has improved over time though." Dae grinned. "Mum hates portkey travel, so they usually end up going by boat, as she doesn't like flying either."

"I quite like it. But then again I'm usually flying first class and not in the cattle section at the back of the plane." Anna didn't really like portkey travel either. "However, I have to admit I've always got a portkey with me; just in case. I still can't quite bring myself to believe that the plane won't crash."

Dae shuddered. He'd only flown once and had refused point blank ever to do so again. "Give me a good old-fashioned portkey any day."

Anna chose that moment to stretch, causing her dressing gown to open at the neck, revealing her bite mark. Looking across, she noticed Dae staring at it. "I'm sure Remus has told you all about me, so you probably already know how I got this."

Dae looked a little embarrassed at being caught. "I spotted it on the night you were treated for the silver nitrate poisoning. It was actually Harry who told me all about the two of you."

"You mean Remus didn't tell you first?" Anna was surprised.

"Remus told me he'd slept with Johanna, the children's nanny, and what he'd done to her." Dae admitted. "However, I only connected you to her when I saw the mark. Harry filled me in on the rest."

"How did you know it was Remus who had given me the bite? It could have been any werewolf." Anna pointed out.

"I have a similar gift from Remus myself." Dae pulled open the collar of his shirt to reveal the same mark.

Anna's mouth fell open. "You mean you and Remus, you know?"

Dae burst out laughing loudly. "I don't think I'm exactly Remus' type. It was done to mark me as a member of his pack."

Anna cast a silencing spell. "I hope we didn't wake anyone up with your laughter."

Dae put the blame firmly on Anna. "It's your fault I laughed like that in the first place. I mean, can you really picture me and Remus together?"

Anna started giggling and couldn't stop. "Not really but it was first thing that came to mind. Why did he mark you then?"

“That’s a story I’d rather leave for a time when I’m feeling depressed.” Dae didn’t want to lose the jovial mood they’d created. “Let’s talk about something else.”

“Such as?” Anna asked.

“How about your fiancé? Most women are always ready to discuss their man.” Dae teased.

At that moment, the fire suddenly flared up, highlighting a silhouette against the doorway. Dropping the silencing spell, Anna smiled brightly up at Remus. “Dae and I were just having a nightcap as we couldn’t sleep. Do you want to join us?”

Remus shook his head. “No thanks. I’ll just get myself a glass of water and go back to bed.”

Dae waited until Remus had completed his task and had gone back into the bedroom before re-establishing the silencing spell. “I don’t think Remus is very happy about finding me here with you.”

Anna looked incredulous. “Remus and I are nothing more than friends, Dae, and besides, as you’ve just mentioned, I’m engaged to someone else.”

“Who you never speak about.” Dae pointed out. “In my experience, most women who are engaged tend to wax joyfully about the charms of their significant other. I’ve barely even heard you mention his name.”

Anna let her hand move up to her neck. “I’m very happy with Mark.”

Dae replaced Anna’s hand with his, and pulled out the gold chain, which held her engagement ring, from under her gown. “Then why you don’t wear this?”

Anna didn’t respond, so Dae let go of her engagement ring and tilted her head up with his hand. “Is it because you’re still in love with Remus?”

“No.” Anna denied Dae’s question.

“Good.” Dae slid his hand from Anna’s chin and into her hair, before leaning forward and kissing her softly. When Anna opened her lips slightly beneath his, Dae accepted the invitation and deepened the kiss.

As she felt her engagement ring slide against her skin, Anna thought of Mark, and pulled away. “I’m sorry, Dae. I can’t do this.”

“So, you are still in love with Remus, aren’t you?” Dae didn’t sound angry, just disappointed. “I know you’re not in love with Mark.”

“You’re right; I’m not in love with Mark. But we have a good relationship, and he makes me happy.” Anna moved away from Dae. “I really am sorry but I can’t kiss you when we’re both engaged to someone else.”

Dae smiled as realized that Anna did like him despite her protestations. “You sound just like Harry.”

“What do you mean?” Anna could feel her heart still racing.

“He kissed Hermione when he thought she was engaged to me. He wouldn’t date her because of his morals in spite of the fact that they both liked each.” Dae grinned as he thought of what poor Harry had gone through.

Anna looked puzzled. “What do you mean by ‘he thought she was engaged to me’?”

Dae explained. “I was never truly engaged to Hermione; I did it to get her out of an unwanted engagement. We actually annulled it last Christmas. However the records are sealed so that she doesn’t get harassed by unwanted suitors.”

“So you’re single then?” Anna felt relieved at Dae’s words.

“Not exactly.” Dae took Anna’s hand in his. “Anna, I’ll be honest with you. I’m currently seeing someone I work with at the Ministry. Vivien

knows I'm supposedly engaged. However, she doesn't know that it's not genuine." Dae wasn't surprised when Anna pulled her hand away.

"Why didn't you tell her?" Anna asked coldly.

Dae flinched at Anna's tone. "Because we both agreed at the start that it was a 'no strings attached' deal."

"You mean it's just about sex?" Anna asked bluntly.

"Quite frankly, yes." Dae was as direct as Anna in his response. "But we're two consenting adults, and we both know the rules."

"Thank you for telling me." Anna knew that her response sounded prissy.

Dae hoped he hadn't blown it with Anna. "Anna, I really like you, which is why I'm being upfront with you about the situation with Hermione and Vivien."

After what he'd told her, Anna knew she owed Dae the same honesty back. "Dae, I really like you as well but you're in a relationship of sorts, and I'm engaged to someone else."

"Who you don't love." Dae picked up Anna's hand once more. "I'd like to see you again once we get out of here."

Anna knew that now he'd taken her hand, Dae would be able to feel her shaking. "I don't know. It took me a long time to get over Remus, and I really care about Mark."

"You're afraid aren't you?" Dae brushed a hair away from Anna's face.

Anna looked down before nodding. "I can't face going through the same turmoil as I went through with Remus again."

"That's why you agreed to marry Mark, isn't it?" Dae brushed his thumb over the back of Anna's hand, trying to soothe her.

“Because I knew I didn't love him, I knew he couldn't hurt me.” Anna couldn't tear her gaze away from where Dae was stroking the back of her hand. “It was easier to settle for companionship.”

“What about passion?” Dae couldn't believe this bright young woman had settled for so little.

“I decided I could live without it.” Anna could feel butterflies in her stomach as Dae continued to stroke the back of her hand.

Dae leant forward and kissed Anna lightly on the lips. When she didn't pull away, he began to nibble softly on her lower lip, making her moan, before releasing her. “And now?”

“I don't know.” Anna admitted. “I didn't expect this.”

Dae knew that if he pushed too hard, Anna would more than likely panic, so he let go of her hand. “Let's take a breather.” He knew he'd made the right decision when he saw Anna begin to relax.” We've both admitted we like each other. Why don't we just take things slowly? If we still feel the same about each other at the end of the time we spend here, we'll decide what to do about it then.”

Anna felt both disappointed and relieved at Dae's offer. “I'd like that.” She picked up her drink, wanting to put some sort of barrier between the two of them. “Why don't you tell me about Harry and Hermione?”

Grinning, Dae did just that.

Six more weeks go by

Hermione watched as Harry shivered on the sofa next to her. “Harry, wake up.”

Harry shot up panting. “Where am I?”

Hermione frowned. “Dae's house.”

By now Harry was fully awake. “Waking up on the sofa threw me for a moment.”

“You were moaning.” Hermione informed him. “Another memory?”

Harry nodded. “Several actually. I know what happened to the other Luna now.”

“Do you want to talk about it?” Hermione opened up the flask of hot chocolate that French had left for her and poured out a mug for Harry.

“Thanks.” Harry gratefully took the mug, savoring the taste of the creamy chocolate as it slid down his throat. Putting the mug down, Harry called for French. “Can you please bring me Dae’s pensieve?”

Having already done this for Harry several times before, French fetched it from the potions room where it was kept. After thanking the elf, Harry pulled several memories out and deposited them into the pensieve. Before pulling Hermione in, Harry blushed. “You might find these memories a little uncomfortable.”

Hermione grabbed Harry’s hand. “They can’t be any worse than seeing myself torturing Pettigrew.”

Harry went even redder. “I didn’t mean that kind of uncomfortable.”

“Then what...” Hermione flushed herself as she finally caught on to what Harry was intimating. “Oh. Oh! That kind of uncomfortable?”

“Exactly.” Harry tightened his grip on Hermione’s hand. “Are you ready?” Hermione nodded and the two of them were swept into the memory. Hermione found herself standing in a room that looked as if it was in Gryffindor tower but she assumed without as many beds as would usually be there. She looked around the room to where she could see the alternate Luna sitting at a table under the window poring over a huge pile of books, while the other Harry was lying back on a huge bed that dominated one half of the room.

Suddenly Luna gave a small cry of joy. “I did it, Harry. I did it.”

“Did what?” Harry guessed she had finally solved the puzzle they’d all been working on for the last few months. He slid hurriedly off the bed towards his wife, only to come a halt at Luna’s answer.

“Found a cure for Buckbeak’s allergies.” Luna smiled ingenuously at Harry.

“You are joking, aren’t you?” Harry wasn’t entirely sure when it came down to Luna and her idiosyncrasies.

Luna looked puzzled. “Why would I be joking? Poor Buckbeak’s been suffering so much lately, I think it’s very important that I help him.”

Harry laughed and pulled his wife towards him. “I thought you were talking about the runic spell translation.”

Luna shrugged. “Oh that. I solved it several days ago.”

Harry shook his head. “And you didn’t think about telling me?”

“I meant to, but then I was watching the fairies in the Bluebeard bushes, and it totally slipped my mind.” Luna looked out of the window and down at the very bushes she was talking about. “They’re so pretty at this time of year.”

If it had been anyone else, Harry would have torn a strip off them, but he just grinned goofily at Luna. “You do know how much I love you, don’t you?”

“Would you care to show me?” Luna fluttered her eyelashes coquettishly at Harry.

Harry shook his head. “I might just be persuaded.” Luna squeaked loudly as Harry picked up her and carried her over to the bed before dropping her onto it.

The memory wavered slightly again before settling down to what must have several hours later. Hermione could tell that it was probably the early hours of the morning; the birds were just starting to

sing and tendrils of light were beginning to make their way into the room.

Harry's face was the first thing Luna saw when she woke up. She reached up and touched it. "What are you doing, Harry?"

"Watching you sleep." Harry gently kissed Luna.

Luna kissed him back before pulling away. "One of us needs the bathroom."

Harry grinned as he watched Luna sashay naked into the bathroom. His smile was soon wiped away as he suddenly found himself held immobile by a spell that Luna herself had cast.

"I'm sorry Harry but I've got to do this, and I can't have you interfering." Luna pulled on her clothes. "I'm going with Hermione to get Severus back."

Harry was furious. He was supposed to be leading that mission, and he'd banned Luna from going. Unable to do anything except watch helplessly, he struggled against the spell as Luna leaned over and kissed him. "I'll always love you." She then pulled a potion out of the bedside locker, and gently massaged Harry's throat forcing him to swallow it.

Hermione felt Harry's arm slip around her as the memory changed.

The sun had moved up in the sky to bathe the former quidditch pitch in bright light and warmth, as Harry dashed over to where Hermione, Remus, who was floating an unconscious Severus in front of him, and several others were making their way back to the castle. "Where is she?"

Hermione drew to a halt and indicated that the others should carry on. "I'm so very sorry, Harry."

Harry shook his head. "No."

“She traded herself for Severus.” Hermione pulled a face. “I tried to stop her but she blasted me out of the way.”

Harry knew that there was more. “Go on.”

“The Dark Lord sent you a message.” Hermione’s face betrayed her dismay at having to be the one to pass it on. “He said he wouldn’t bother searching for her but he’ll send her back when they’ve finished with her.”

Harry collapsed onto the floor at the news. “Why was she allowed to go in the first place? You knew I was supposed to be heading that mission.”

“She told me that you were still feeling unwell after your bout with the food poisoning, and that she was going to take your place.” Hermione’s face was now unreadable as she explained why Harry’s wife had gone to her death. “It’s not as if she hadn’t taken over a mission for you before. Why didn’t you stop her?”

Harry scowled. “I didn’t get the chance. She petrified me before slipping me a sleeping potion. She knew I’d never had let her go if I’d been awake.”

“Why do you think she did it?” Hermione hadn’t been able to work out why Luna had willingly traded herself for Harry’s father.

“She knew I wouldn’t try the spell if she was still alive.” Harry’s face was like stone. “She also knew I needed Severus to make the potion I have to take if I’m going to use the spell.”

Hermione now understood the reason behind Luna’s sacrifice. “She was very brave.”

“I don’t care about how brave she was. I wish she’d never managed to translate the fucking spell.” Harry dropped his head into arms.

Hermione sank down next to Harry before pulling him into her arms as he finally broke down completely and wept.

Hermione could feel Harry shaking as the memory came to a halt. "Is that it?"

Harry shook his head. "There's one more."

The memory blurred one final time before solidifying to reveal an obviously naked Harry and Hermione lying under a sheet in bed together.

Harry was talking to Hermione. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that."

Hermione shook her head. "Don't be ridiculous. It was nothing more than a tension reliever."

Harry pushed Hermione's hair out of her face. "You say that every time."

"And you always say you shouldn't have done it." Hermione leant back against the pillows.

"But I always feel so guilty about Luna and Ron." Harry admitted.

Hermione sighed. "Luna's been gone for over six months now. She wouldn't want you to beat yourself up over something as simple as sex. And Ron's been gone for so long, it sometimes feels as if we were never together."

"I can't believe this might be our last night here." Harry picked up a cigarette from the bedside table and lit it.

Hermione pulled it out of his fingers. "What have I told you about them?"

Harry pulled a face. "I might die tomorrow, and you're denying me a cigarette?"

"You don't know that." Hermione didn't quite meet Harry's eyes as she said it.

Harry took Hermione's hand. "If I have to do the spell and it works, then it will wipe out everything around here for miles. If things are looking bad, promise me you'll get out."

"I promise." Hermione still didn't meet Harry's eyes. "Just make sure you kill Voldemort before you have to do the spell."

"I will." Harry lied as well; he knew he had no chance of defeating Voldemort as they still hadn't tracked down the last horcrux.

"Harry, tell me you love me." Hermione demanded as she began to kiss his neck.

"I love you." Harry ground out before pulling Hermione back down the bed and under the sheet.

The memory then went fuzzy, and Harry pulled Hermione out.

"It's weird." Harry began. "This time I knew what he was thinking and how he was feeling. It was almost as if I was him."

Hermione was a little taken aback at Harry's news but not entirely shocked. "He is you, so it's not really surprising that this has happened."

"I've never felt that upset before. When he was crying, I felt as if I couldn't breathe; it hurt too much. He really didn't want to live without Luna." Harry could feel himself shaking again as he thought about the other Harry and what he'd gone through.

"He'd just lost his wife." Hermione pointed out. "Anyone who cared about someone like that would be devastated."

Harry sat down. "He wasn't going to do the spell. He didn't want to leave her."

"So she left him instead." Hermione sat down next to Harry and passed his mug of chocolate back to him after warming it up. "He must have eventually done the spell because he had nothing else to live for."

Harry disagreed. "He cared deeply for the other Hermione."

Hermione blushed as she thought about what she'd seen her other self doing. "I have to admit I didn't expect one of your memories to be our alternate selves in bed together." She grimaced. "Nor that the other Hermione had been seeing Ron Prewett; well, I take it she meant Prewett."

Harry hid his smile at Hermione's disgust. "Now you see why I said you might find it uncomfortable."

"Despite what he told her, he wasn't in love with her was he?" Hermione didn't see how he could have been.

"No, he wasn't." Harry told her. "He did love her, but he wasn't in love with her." Harry put down the mug. "It feels so odd. I'd just gotten used to the memories, but I didn't really view them much more differently than watching a Muggle movie. Now knowing what that Harry was thinking, and how he was feeling, makes them seem that much more real."

Hermione suspected that things for Harry were going to start getting a little tougher now that he not only had the other Harry's memories to deal with, but his feelings too. "I'd say that things are going to be a little different for you now."

Harry gave a small smile. "That's quite an understatement."

Hermione squeezed his hand. "Are you going to show these memories to the others?"

Harry blushed, and shook his head. "I'm sure Luna wouldn't want anyone knowing what she looks like in the buff."

"I'm not too keen on sharing my other self's obvious nakedness either; even if she was mostly under the sheet." Hermione responded tartly.

Remus stuck his head around the door. "I think it's time for you two to get to bed."

Harry stood up and hugged Hermione. "Thanks Hermione. We'll talk more in the morning. Goodnight."

"Goodnight Harry." Hermione picked up her book before heading off to her bedroom.

"Is everything okay?" Remus spotted the pensieve.

Harry blushed. "Some other memories, but they're ones I'd rather not show directly to everyone. Can you show me how to remove them?"

Remus smiled and instructed Harry on how to do exactly that.

Harry called for French to return the pensieve before telling Remus about the memories. "I'll fill everyone in on the memories tomorrow. It covers the other Luna and Hermione."

"There's something else isn't there?" Remus could tell that Harry was feeling a little agitated.

"These memories were different. I could feel what the other Harry was feeling, and I somehow knew what he was thinking." Harry ran a hand through his hair. "It's certainly going to make things a little more interesting."

"And informative." Despite Harry's palpable distress at the new shift, Remus thought it was a good thing. "We might be able to gain some insight on how he dealt with the Dark Lord."

"He couldn't kill him. They were still looking for the final horcrux when he used the spell." Harry informed his Dad.

Remus felt queasy at the word horcrux. "I think we can worry about this more in the morning. It's time you got some sleep."

Harry could tell that Remus was uneasy at his news. "I guess I could do with some more sleep. I think I'll take a dreamless sleep potion though."

Remus walked into the potions lab and grabbed what Harry had asked for, before following his son into the bedroom.

Three weeks to go

"I'm really close to attempting my first transformation. Maman said that now I've been able to change my arms, legs and eyesight, I should be able to try a full change within the next few weeks." Harry shared the news he'd been keeping secret for almost two weeks.

Hermione grinned. "I'm really pleased. I wish I had time to continue my training more often, but I don't want to miss what Papa and Nic are doing."

Harry knew that Hermione was keeping careful notes and documenting every step that was being taken in the small lab. "I bet you're really enjoying it aren't you?"

Hermione nodded. "It's so fascinating..." She stopped. "I'm sure you don't want to hear about every last detail. I can give you a copy of my notes if you're really interested."

Harry would have listened to Hermione all night if she'd let him. "I hear that Anna is planning a birthday party for you, even though it won't really be your birthday."

"It sort of will be. Anyway you had a pretend party yourself." Hermione pointed out.

Harry chuckled. "Don't remind me. I think Maman was far too excited at getting me for an entire day of birthday celebrations."

Hermione knew that Lily was enjoying the time she was getting to spend with her son, "She's never had you to herself like that before. I know that she's really missing the other children and Sirius though."

"I miss Dudley and the others. It's going to feel strange going back to school and only a couple of days will have actually passed." Harry was still finding it hard to believe that time was only advancing at a crawl outside the room they were in.

Hermione sympathized with Harry. "I know just how you feel. But I've got to be honest. I've really enjoyed this. I'm going to hate not being able to spend so much time with you."

"You spend more time with me at school." Harry pointed out.

"I meant sharing the meals, and talking together like this." Hermione clarified her point. "It's a little difficult at school unless we sneak off to the Room of Requirement. I feel bad asking Frances to get rid of the portrait guarding the room just so that we can spend five minutes alone."

Harry fell silent and looked at his hands. Hermione frowned. "What's wrong?"

Harry could feel his stomach flopping over as he took hold of Hermione's hand. "Even though we've been here for so long, this is the first time we've been able to sit down and really talk in depth."

"I know that; usually everyone ends up interrupting. I'm glad it's just the two of us." Hermione could see that Harry had suddenly become very nervous, but before he could say anything fate intervened once more.

Severus' voice interrupted them. "I think it's time for bed."

Harry dropped Hermione's hand and shot up off the sofa. Hermione got up more slowly. "Goodnight Harry."

"Goodnight Hermione." Harry watched as she made her way to the ladies' bedroom, before turning to face Severus.

Severus loomed over Harry. "Are you waiting for something?"

"No, Sir." Harry blushed.

"Bed then." Severus pointed in the direction of the bedroom, and watched as Harry went in and Remus came out.

"I couldn't help but overhear." Remus sat down next to Severus, smiling when French appeared with two glasses, one filled with firewhiskey and the other scotch.

"I think I might have just stopped your son from asking Hermione out on a date." Severus took a large mouthful of the firewhiskey, coughing as it hit the back of his throat. "But I don't think I'm going to be able to delay the inevitable for much longer."

"I know what you mean." Remus imitated Severus, only minus the coughing. "I think I can still remember what it was like to be their age."

Severus shuddered. "Don't remind me. You do know that I'll skin him alive if he lays a finger on Hermione."

Remus laughed. "You and me both. Just be thankful that Hermione is almost a year older than Harry and therefore likely to be more sensible."

Severus smiled proudly. "She is a sensible girl but I'm still not too sure about her good sense when it comes down to Harry."

"I'll speak to him in the morning if it makes you feel better." Having daughters of his own, Remus had a fairly good idea of how Severus was feeling about the whole thing.

Severus shook his head. "He's not asked her out yet, and I might be wrong. I wouldn't want to embarrass him." He sighed. "I didn't mind Hermione being engaged to Longbottom or Dae. Longbottom's an idiot who wouldn't know what to do if the opportunity presented itself to him on a platter, and Dae was far too old to be trying anything anyway."

"It might make you feel better to know that Harry is really shy and totally unsure of himself around girls." Remus informed Severus. "I doubt that they'll get much further than holding hands and kissing until he's at least twenty."

Severus burst out laughing. "If only."

Remus chinked his glass against Severus', and the two of them slipped into a discussion of how the research was progressing.

One day remaining

Harry prowled around the sitting room before settling down on the carpet. Remus was proud of what Harry had managed to achieve in such a short time frame. Severus and Nic had finished the potion Severus needed to take a few days earlier, and all they had needed was for Harry to complete his transformation and to tell Harry about what they wanted him to do.

Harry changed back. "That feels so funny."

Lily smiled. "You'll get used to it. The more you do it, the easier it will become."

Severus looked serious. "Harry, there's something more important about your transformation than we told you."

Harry felt his stomach flop over. He had a fairly good idea of what Severus was going to ask. "You need me to bite you, don't you?"

Severus nodded. "Your bite is as close as we're going to get to that of a werewolf. Nic will then make the scar from that bite permanent."

Harry started to shiver. "Where have I got to bite you?"

Severus looked at Remus. "Where would you bite someone?"

"Probably your neck or throat." Remus hugged Harry. "I know it's going to be hard to do it, but believe me when I say you'll be saving Severus from a fate worse than death."

Harry swallowed hard and looked at Hermione, who moved across the room to hug him. "I know you can do it."

Harry stepped away from Hermione and watched as Severus knelt down and bared his neck, before morphing into his animagus form. Panicking, he just as quickly changed back. "I can't do it."

Severus got up and put his arm around a trembling Harry. "I trust you." Severus then whispered in his ear. "Pretend it's the Idiot-Who-Lived you're biting."

Harry laughed out loud, making everyone wonder what Severus had said to him. Then, with everyone watching, Harry changed once more. Not wanting to think about it, this time he didn't even give Severus time to kneel before leaping into the air and sinking his teeth into the soft skin close to Severus' throat. As Severus collapsed under Harry's weight, Harry released him and changed back, before bursting into tears. Severus immediately pulled him into his arms and gently rocked him, trying to reassure him. "It's going to be okay, Harry."

Nic touched Severus on the arm. "I'm sorry Severus, but we need to deal with the wound."

Harry swallowed hard and got up, moving to stand next to Remus who slung his arm comfortingly around Harry's shoulder.

Severus sat still as Nic made sure the wound would become a permanent livid scar. "All done."

Severus shook his head. "Not quite. I still need to take the potion."

Nic pulled the vial out from his pocket. "Bottoms up, Severus."

Severus grimaced as he took the potion from Nic and swallowed it. Moments passed and nothing discernible happened. "I'm not sure it's worked."

Anna stood in front of him. "Hit me."

“I’m not hitting a woman.” Severus sounded indignant.

Remus let go of Harry and took her place. “Hit me instead.”

Severus drew back his fist and let it fly into Remus’ stomach. Remus went down, gasping at the strength behind the punch. “I think I can safely say it worked.” Severus pulled him to his feet and shook his hand. “Thanks.”

French suddenly appeared with bottles of champagne. “Master Dae has been keeping these to celebrate with.”

Harry sat down weakly on the sofa, as relief flooded him that the potion had worked. He’d hated biting Severus but it seemed as if he had spared his Dad from having to do the same thing, but with much worse consequences.

Remus passed Harry a glass of champagne. “I think you deserve this.” He replaced his arm around Harry’s shoulder, before kissing Harry on the forehead. “Thank you. You have no idea how much this means to me.”

Feeling too choked to speak, Harry snuggled closer to his Remus, needing the comfort of his father after what he had just done.

Hermione sat down on the other side of Harry and took his free hand. “Thanks Harry.”

Harry flashed a watery smile at his friend before knocking back the champagne Remus had given him. Remus decided that, despite Harry’s age, this was probably the one time he really needed a drink and he nodded at French. “Let him have as much as wants.”

Lily shook her head at Remus but said nothing. They’d done something similar at Harry’s age and had both lived to regret it. Hopefully Harry would turn out to be more sensible than they’d been. Sighing, she held out her own glass for a top-up.

Anna could feel her stomach going over as she sipped her champagne. She could feel Dae’s eyes on her, and knew that he’d

expect an answer from her once everyone had gone to bed. Distracted, she missed what Lily was saying. "I'm sorry, I didn't catch that."

"I was asking if you were excited about going back to Hogwarts." Lily wondered what was up with Anna. She was usually totally unflappable. "Are you alright?"

Anna nodded. "It just feels surreal to know that we're going back to the world where the last four months haven't happened yet."

Lily grinned. "Tell me about it. I can't wait to see Sirius and the children. I'm just glad that I wasn't pregnant when I came in here. I don't know how I would have explained that away."

The two women burst out laughing at the thought of a very pregnant Lily suddenly appearing after only one day.

Dae watched as the two women giggled together. They'd come a long way since their first disastrous meeting. Remus walked over to him, and began a conversation. Dae, however, still kept part of his attention on Anna.

Eventually everyone except Anna and Dae made their way to bed. Remus was the last to go. "Are you two not coming to bed?"

Dae shook his head. "We're going to have a nightcap. You're welcome to join us."

Remus knew that Dae didn't really want him there, and shook his head. "Thanks but I think I'll turn in. I've got the feeling it's going to be a long day tomorrow."

Anna wished him goodnight before nervously turning to Dae. "So where's that nightcap you mentioned?"

Dae nodded to the two glasses that sat on the side table. "French left them for us." He could see that Anna was shaking. "Anna, relax. I'm not going to bite."

Anna let out a deep breath. "I'm being ridiculous aren't I? It's not as if we haven't spent nights talking alone since we discussed our respective relationships is it?"

Dae sat down and passed her a glass. "Sit down and drink this."

After taking a sip of the Baileys French had left for her, Anna took another deep breath and reached around her neck. "I think it's time I stopped wearing this."

Dae watched as Anna unclipped the necklace she wore. "Are you sure about this?"

Anna nodded. "I'm not being fair to Mark or myself." She slid the necklace and the ring into her pocket, not entirely sure of what to do next.

Dae could see Anna's hand was still shaking as she picked up her glass of Baileys again. "I know you've got to go back to Hogwarts when we return tomorrow, but I'd like to see you when you have some free time."

Anna looked regretful. "I doubt very much whether I'll get any on my return. With OWLs and NEWTs on the horizon, my time is mostly going to be spent helping those students who need the extra tuition."

Dae felt his heart sink. "Is this your way of gently turning me down?"

Anna immediately hurried to allay his fears. "Of course not." She swallowed hard before continuing. "Dae, I think you should know that I'm in love with you."

At her words Dae dropped his glass onto the floor, uncaring of the mess it made, and pulled Anna into his arms, hungrily covering her lips with his own. When he finally released her, he shakily leant his forehead against her own. "I think I'd better stop there. I don't want an audience when I finally get to make love to you."

Anna laughed unsteadily. "Me neither."

Dae kissed her once more before pulling back. "Anna, you have no idea how much I want you."

Anna blushed. "I'm not quite sure how to answer that."

Dae grinned. "That's why I love you."

Even though she'd admitted her love to him, Anna hadn't expected him to respond in turn. "You love me?"

Dae nodded. "I think I've been in love with you since the first moment I saw you." It was now Dae's turn to be nervous as he slipped onto the floor and onto one knee. "Anna, I want to marry you, if you'll have me."

Anna was stunned. "But you hardly know me."

"I know enough to know that there's no-one else who makes me feel the way you do." Dae admitted.

Anna hesitated. "I feel the same way about you but..."

Dae had a feeling he knew what was bothering her. "You want to know who I really am, don't you?"

Anna made a snap decision. "Dae, I love you and want to be your wife, no matter who you are. If you aren't ready to tell me, then I'll wait until you are."

Dae felt elated at Anna's words but knew he didn't want to hide his true identity from her any longer. "Anna, I don't want to start out with any secrets between us. Let me just raise a privacy bubble."

Anna watched with bated breath as Dae invoked the bubble and dropped his glamour. "But you're..."

"I know." Dae grinned cheekily. "I'm an honest to goodness specimen of sexiness."

Anna punched him playfully in the arm. "And so reserved too."

Dae grinned once more before a more somber look replaced the smile. "I'm going to kiss you once more, and then we'll talk."

Anna groaned lightly as Dae nibbled gently on her lower lip before lightly kissing her and pulling away. "Tease."

"You know you like it." Dae pulled Anna close to him. "Are you ready for a long story?"

At Anna's nod, Dae snuck one more kiss before beginning his tale. "Once upon a time..."

Next Chapter: Severus is 'bitten'; the quidditch world cup; Sirius learns a secret.

Chapter 40: The Quidditch World Cup

Tuesday, May 17th 1994

Harry still felt queasy despite the hangover potion Severus had given him. He just hoped that leaving the house wouldn't involve too much moving around. Thankfully it didn't, and both he and the group breathed a collective sigh of relief as they all experienced a feeling of stillness and then a slight popping sound in their ears.

"It's over." Nic picked up the small device. "Everyone's free to go their own separate ways. Lily, you can take the rest of this week off. Come and see me on Monday morning, and we'll sort out your new work schedule."

Lily hugged Nic. "I'll be in at 9am. I just hope that Sirius coped alright with the children while I was gone for so long. I mean while I was out yesterday." She pulled a face at herself. "I'm worried that he didn't get my note."

Peri patted her on the arm. "He'll have coped just fine, and Felicity has never failed to deliver a letter yet."

Lily sighed. "It's going to be so strange going back home but I've really missed the children. They're going to think I've gone mad if I'm too enthusiastic."

Harry hugged his mother. "I'll see you during the holidays, Maman. I'll miss you."

Lily kissed him on the cheek. "I'll miss you too. Don't forget, no changing into your animagus form if Remus or Severus isn't there."

Harry sighed at Lily's warning. "I know."

Anna also hugged Lily. "I'll see you during the holidays as well."

Lily had invited Anna to visit whenever she wanted to. "You can owl me if Harry's any trouble in the meantime."

Anna put her arm around Harry. "I don't want to tire the owls out."

"Anna." Harry pouted. "I'm one of your best students."

Dae lifted a hand in a farewell gesture. "I'll see everyone during the holidays." He then apparated out.

Anna felt a little dismayed that he hadn't even looked at her, particularly after the night they'd just spent talking together. Turning her attention back to the others, she bade goodbye to Nic and Peri before taking Harry and Hermione's hands and apparating out with them, knowing that Severus and Remus would be mere moments behind.

As they made their way up to Hogwarts, Anna turned to the others. "Let me do the explaining as to where we've been."

Remus and Severus had also heard footsteps coming towards them. They hadn't even reached the school gates when they spotted Dumbledore. He looked a little surprised to see them coming towards him but immediately halted and began questioning them. "Minerva explained about the attack. Why didn't you come back to Hogwarts?"

"Remus and the children had been badly hurt. Having been hurt myself, I couldn't apparate with all three of them to the school boundaries, so I portkeyed them to my father's home instead. He's a good friend of Hermione's fiancé, so my father contacted him as Hermione had been hurt. You know the rest from there." Anna kept eye contact with Dumbledore, totally unfazed by his piercing stare.

Dumbledore didn't know much about his mysterious Muggle Studies teacher, apart from what she had told him. "And may I ask who your father is?"

"Macallister Jameson." Anna hid her smile as Dumbledore suddenly became extremely accommodating.

"I think we should get the children to the hospital wing to be checked over as a precautionary measure; not that your father wouldn't have provided the very best of care of course." Albus wondered if he could

talk Anna into introducing him to the billionaire. It wouldn't hurt to have access to someone of his stature. "Anna, would you care to join me for a cup of tea before you return to class?"

Anna excused herself. "Normally I'd love to, Headmaster, but I really need to get my lesson plans together for the rest of today. Even though I only missed one day, with OWLs and NEWTs coming up, I feel a little guilty about neglecting my students."

Albus then turned to Remus and Severus. "Perhaps you two would care to join me instead?"

Severus made the same excuse. "I also need to get back. My next potions lesson starts in a few minutes and I don't wish to leave those dunderheads alone any longer than I have to. I hate to think how this morning went without me."

Remus also refused. "I'm afraid I'm going to have to use the same reason as Anna and Severus. I too have students I should have been tutoring last night. If you'll excuse me, I really do need to grab my notes before heading to class."

Albus had one final question for Anna. "Do you know who attacked you?"

"My father thinks it was someone with a grudge against him who might have tracked me down." Anna shrugged. "Then again, it could just have been opportunistic. I doubt we'll ever find out."

After finding out who Anna's father was, Albus just took her explanation at face value. "We'll have to make sure that the path is clear the next time you go to Hogsmeade."

Anna shook her head. "My father will arrange for someone to protect me and the children from now on. You won't see them, but I can assure you that they'll be there."

Satisfied, Albus left the group, and continued on his way to Hogsmeade. It was obvious to everyone that Albus' meeting with

them had been by chance only, as he appeared to have business outside of the school. Severus grinned at Anna. "Nicely done."

Anna smirked. "Tell me about. If my father ever got his hands on Remus, I think he would have added to the handiwork Amicus had already started, not helped him. I'll contact Dad and let him know the situation, so he doesn't slip up if Dumbledore should attempt to check out my story."

"Why doesn't your Dad like Remus, I mean Professor Lupin?" Hermione had to catch herself. After getting used to addressing Remus by his first name, she was finding it a little strange having to call him Professor again.

Harry also looked curiously at Anna as, although he knew that her Dad had helped her to disappear, he hadn't been aware that Anna's father didn't like his Dad.

"That's a story for another time." Anna grinned maliciously at Remus, who had pulled a face at the mention of her father. "Actually, I think we should get Professor Lupin into the infirmary before he returns to his classes. His injuries were pretty bad. I'm sure I can convince Poppy to find him something he needs to take."

Remus scowled. "Thank you so much for your concern. Who needs enemies when they have friends like you?"

Everyone laughed before going their separate ways; the children to the infirmary and the three Professors to see what had happened in their short absence from the school.

24th May 1994

Remus took the Wolfsbane Potion, grimacing at the taste. "Why can't you do something to make this taste better?"

"Well, I could but it would affect how well this latest version works for reducing the pain you have to go through." Severus informed him, before turning to the matter that was weighing most heavily upon his mind. "Are you ready for tonight?"

Remus shook his head. "Not really, but we don't have a lot of choice in the matter do we?" Remus looked seriously at Severus. "You do know that despite the Wolfsbane, there's still a chance I might attack you for real?"

Severus nodded. "I know that, but we can't ignore the possibility that Amicus might be watching, so we're still going to have to go through the motions. Dae got the portkey to me." He passed Remus a small tablet shaped object. "This won't become active until just before sunset. You'll need to swallow it before you change. The password is "Wolfsbane."

Remus looked a little nervous. "I need to be back in the Shrieking Shack before Dumbledore discovers I've gotten out."

"Dae will be waiting to reactivate the portkey, and to repair any damage I do to you." Severus could already feel his stomach churning with nerves. "Good luck, and I'll see you later, I suppose."

"With your enhanced eyesight, I'm sure you'll have no problem spotting me." Remus remarked wryly, as he passed the empty goblet back to Severus. "Let's just hope that everything goes to plan."

Later that evening

Invisible to anyone who might be watching, Amicus surveyed the ground below from his vantage point just above the trees. He spotted Severus as soon as he entered the Forest, his wand lighting the ground up before him. Peering down through the foliage, Amicus could see that Severus was foraging on the floor for something he couldn't make out from the height he was at. Amicus' head snapped round as a howl echoed through the night. Returning his attention to the man below him, he could see that Severus too had heard the noise, as he picked up his things before starting to hurry away back towards the edge of the Forest. Amicus hovered silently overhead as moments later, Severus was knocked to the ground by a large furry object that had bounded out from the bushes to the man's right.

Pinned under the werewolf, Severus managed to yell out a curse, which made the werewolf howl and back off as its fur was set alight. Despite its injury, it rounded angrily on Severus who, holding his hand to his throat, threw the strongest stunning spell he could at it. As the werewolf collapsed, Severus hurried to get out of the Forest before the werewolf recovered its senses. Satisfied that Remus had done as he was ordered, Amicus apparated out of the area.

Once he reached the school, Severus stumbled into the entrance way and collapsed onto the floor. Seeing him come in, Albus ran over to him, with Filius following closely behind. "Severus, what's happened?"

Severus lifted his hand from his throat to reveal a bloody bite mark. "Werewolf."

Albus looked furious. "Filius, get Severus to the hospital wing."

Albus stormed out of the building, before disappearing under the Whomping Willow and making his way up the tunnel that led to the Shrieking Shack. Keeping his wand drawn, Albus eventually reached the door to the Shack. Checking it, he found that it was still warded and, after casting a spell which allowed him to look through it, he could see Remus pacing up and down the room. It was obvious that Remus hadn't been the culprit in the attack, which meant that there was a rogue werewolf somewhere out on the school grounds. Making his way back down the tunnel, Albus was now more wary as he returned to the school. Hurrying inside, he invoked a lockdown before heading for the infirmary. When he got there, he found Severus lying on a bed being tended to by Filius. Albus frowned. "Where's Poppy?"

Filius looked up. "She wasn't here when I came in. After checking, I found out that she's apparently been taken ill; some sort of viral infection. St. Mungo's will be sending over one of their interns in the morning to cover for her for the next few days."

Albus looked at the bite mark which was standing out in stark contrast to the pale skin of Severus' neck. "Why were you out on the night of the full moon?"

"I needed some Lunar Flowers which, as you know, only bloom on the night of the full moon." Severus had already decided on this excuse before he'd left for the Forest, as one of the potions Dumbledore wanted him to make required the flowers as a key ingredient. "I was searching for the flowers when I heard a howl. I therefore decided to leave but before I could get to safety I was attacked by something that shot out of the bushes. I only realized what it was when it sank its teeth into my neck. Luckily I didn't drop my wand and I managed to set its fur on fire. Then, even though I knew it would only work as a temporary measure, I stunned it, giving me enough time to get out of the Forest."

Albus now knew for sure that Remus hadn't done it. "It wasn't Remus. He's still safely locked up in the Shrieking Shack and I didn't see any evidence of damage on him."

Severus lay back against the pillows. "I didn't think it was. I gave him his Wolfsbane earlier today." Severus wanted to sneer at the Headmaster. It wasn't as if Remus would have bitten him, and then gone tamely back to the Shrieking Shack if he had been running wild.

"Can you tell me what this werewolf looked like?" Albus asked.

"It all happened so fast, so not really. However, I did catch a glimpse of grey fur in the moonlight as I stunned it and ran off." Severus hid his smirk as he happily lied to the Headmaster.

"I'll arrange for someone from the Ministry to come out and interview you." Albus wanted to keep it quiet that there were now two werewolves on his staff, and decided to ask his contact at the Ministry to come out and discretely deal with the problem.

"Thank you, Headmaster." Severus sighed and lay back.

"Well, I'll leave you to get some sleep." Albus turned to walk out. "Filius, are you staying here tonight?"

Filius nodded. "I told St. Mungo's that I would monitor the ward until the morning. I'll keep an eye on Severus and deal with any students

who might need attention overnight. If it's anything I can't deal with, I'll contact St. Mungo's.

"I'll be off then." Content that Filius had everything in hand, Albus left, leaving Filius and Severus alone in the ward.

Filius threw up a privacy bubble. "Did everything go to plan?"

Severus nodded. "I presume so. Dae must have done his part, otherwise Remus wouldn't have made it safely back into the Shack."

Filius smiled briefly, before his face became serious. "I've got bad news about my brother for you."

Severus scowled. "I thought the surveillance was being dropped this weekend."

"It was supposed to have been but he's disappeared." Filius didn't look happy. "One of my team observed an owl arriving at the premises on Sunday, and watched as Dominic left shortly afterwards. Someone followed him; but he must have activated a portkey the moment he apparated out. They were able to trace him so far, but he'd set up decoy portkeys, and they lost him. He hasn't returned back to his house since then."

"Damn." Severus had been so close to being finally able to deal with one of his wife's purported attackers. "Where do you think he's gone?"

"To You-Know-Who, where else?" Flitwick couldn't think of anywhere else he could have gone. "There's more. Our contact at Gringotts said that he made a sizeable withdrawal from his account. It looks as though he's planning an absence of undeterminable length."

Severus pinched his nose and closed his eyes. "Not exactly a great finish to a harrowing night."

Filius looked regretful. "I'm sorry, Severus. If I hear anything else, I'll let you know."

"Thanks, Leo." Severus opened his eyes. "I'm going to try and get some sleep."

"I'll see you in the morning then." Filius cancelled the bubble and left Severus to his thoughts.

18th June 1994

Harry still couldn't believe that third year was over, and it was time to go home. The remainder of the school year since returning from Dae's house, had gone well. One of his main joys was that Ravenclaw had again won both the house and quidditch cups; albeit only by a few points as far as the quidditch cup was concerned. Dudley and George had both sworn that Slytherin had cheated to finish so closely behind Ravenclaw, something Fred had hotly denied. Hermione, despite not being a big fan of quidditch, had been both disappointed at Slytherin's loss and happy at Ravenclaw's triumph, though mostly for Harry's sake more than anything else. Harry was also pleased that he'd managed to finish second academically in the year to Hermione; who had beaten him in just over half of his classes.

He was spending the first week of the holidays at home with his Mum but the week he was looking forward to most was the one he would be spending with Hermione. After staying with her, he would be spending the last week of the holidays with Lily and Sirius, who had informed him via letter that the Quidditch World Cup was being held in England, and that Harry, Sirius and Orion would be attending. Out of his friends, only George, Fred and Draco were going. George and Fred were going with their Dad, who had somehow managed to acquire six tickets for the Minister's Box. Sadly the other attendees were going to be Jamie, Ron and Ginny. Harry was just glad that they wouldn't be sitting with them.

At the sound of footsteps Harry looked up from the trunk he was currently sitting atop of. "Potter, what do you want?"

"Not you, Lupin. I'm just waiting for Dad to collect me." Jamie indicated the trunk at his side. "We're going on vacation to Paris for the first week of the summer break. Dad told me that you've managed

to wangle an invitation to the Quidditch World Cup.”

“I didn’t wangle anything.” Harry really disliked his brother, and his snotty attitude. “I was invited by Sirius.”

“Yeah, right. He probably just felt sorry for you.” Jamie knew that wasn’t true. In fact he was more than a little jealous of how much Sirius appeared to like Harry. “Anyway, I’ve got better things to do than to talk to you. My girlfriend is coming.”

Not bothering to look over, Harry heard Cho greet his brother. Harry just wanted to get out of there but couldn’t move as he’d promised Hermione he’d say goodbye before going, and he had to wait for Grimstock to arrive.

Hermione came up the passageway to find Cho and Jamie locked at the lips. Pulling a face, Hermione stepped around them and sat down by Harry on his trunk. “Are you still coming over the week before you go to visit Lily?”

Harry nodded enthusiastically. “I’ll be counting down the days.” Harry dropped his voice so his brother wouldn’t hear. “Mr. Weasley is going to bring me over in his flying car.”

Hermione was quite intrigued at the idea of a flying car. “Papa will have to arrange to meet you somewhere. Snape Manor is unplottable and you’ll need him to get you past the wards. Mama said that the whole family is welcome to stay the night. I think she wants to hold a dinner party.”

“Charlie and Bill might be visiting.” Harry didn’t want the rest of George’s family to be left out if indeed they visited as they’d promised.

“It won’t be a problem. Just let me know a few days beforehand.” Hermione stood up. “I need to go. Papa’s waiting for me.”

Harry pulled Hermione into a hug, and whispered into her ear. “I’ll miss you.”

Hermione didn't want to let go. "I'll miss you too."

Harry finally released her under the watchful eye of his twin. "See you soon."

Hermione flashed him a quick smile before running off.

Jamie laughed. "You're pathetic. You can't get your own girlfriend, so you have to pant after someone else's." Nestled in Jamie's arms, Cho smirked at her boyfriend's comment.

Harry just smiled complacently at his brother and Cho. After all the troubles he'd gone through in the last six months, he'd finally learnt how to control his temper. "Think that if it makes you happy."

Any further discourse between the two boys was prevented as Grimstock Lovegood appeared at the door. "Harry, it's nice to see you're ready. Where's everyone else?"

"I'm here, Uncle Grim." Georgie pushed by her brother to rush forward and hug Grim.

Harry politely held out his hand once Georgie had finished saying hello. "It's nice to see you again, Sir."

Grim hid his disappointment at Harry's formal manner as he shook hands with him. Grim knew that, out of all of the children, Harry was still having problems coming to terms with him marrying his mother. "Nia is looking forward to seeing all of you again."

A few minutes later, the three stragglers all strolled into the foyer together. Luna gave a yell when she saw her Uncle before jumping up into his arms. Grim swung her around before putting her back down on the ground. He then greeted Auri and Dudley, both of whom hugged him in the same way Georgie had; Auri having quickly gotten over her initial shock at her mother's remarriage. "Right, we'll be off then. Let me just shrink that trunk of yours, Harry."

As he watched Grimstock and his charges leave, Jamie felt relieved that everyone had finally gone so that he could spend a few minutes alone with Cho. He was just about to kiss her again when he heard a man's voice call his name. "Jamie, over here."

Jamie's face fell when he saw Craig walking up to him. "Where's Dad?"

"He couldn't make it; he's had to leave to attend a conference in Amsterdam." Craig had been annoyed when Sirius had scheduled an out of town conference for the same day the boys returned home. "He said he was really sorry. I thought I might as well save Draco from having to ride the train and offered to pick you both up."

"Thanks for coming to get me." Jamie watched as Craig shrank his trunk, before popping it in his pocket and moving outside to do the same for Draco. "I'll be there in a minute. Let me finish saying goodbye to Cho."

Jamie kissed Cho one last time. "I'll see you during the holidays."

Cho hugged Jamie tightly before letting go. "Don't forget to write to me."

"I won't." Jamie squeezed her hand one last time before dashing out to where Draco and Craig were standing. "Are we flooing or apparating?"

"I thought we'd floo to Diagon Alley, have some lunch and look around the shops before returning." Craig suggested.

Both boys were happy about that, even if they weren't happy about spending time with each other.

"It sounds good to me." Draco assured his stepfather. "How's Mum doing?"

Craig's face lit up. "She's doing really well. You'll be pleased to learn that you're going to have a little sister."

After meeting all of Harry's sisters, Draco had been hoping that it would be a girl. "That's fantastic, Uncle Craig."

Craig could see that the boy was genuinely happy about the news. "Narcy's hoping she'll arrive before you have to leave for school."

"Me too." Draco's step now had a definite bounce to it. "I want to pick up something nice for Mum and my future sister at Diagon Alley."

Craig was thankful that Draco had finally come round to the idea of a younger sibling. "We'll look for something after we've eaten."

On reaching Hogsmeade, the three of them paid the requisite fee to use Rosmerta's fireplace and disappeared off to Diagon Alley.

On the other side of Hogsmeade at Fable House, Nia heard voices coming up the path and waited nervously for the children to come in. Dudley was first and rushed over to hug his mother. "Hi, Mum. Great, you've been baking."

Dudley reached around his mother to grab a muffin, only for Nia to slap his hand away. "They're for lunch."

Auri and Georgie both threw themselves on their mother together. "Mum, we've really missed you." Auri would have launched into a recitation about her school year if Georgie hadn't pulled her away. "Let Harry get in."

Harry put Scarlett down before burying himself in his mother's embrace for a moment before pulling away and kissing her on the cheek. "Congratulations, Mum. I hope Uncle Grim knows how lucky he is."

Grim let out a sigh of relief that, despite Harry's reserved treatment of him at the school, he appeared to have finally come to terms with the idea of his marrying Nia. "I'll take good care of her, Harry."

Harry shook Grim's hand. "I know you will, Sir. If you'll excuse me, I'd like to go and unpack." Harry turned a little uncertainly.

Nia realized that Harry didn't know where to go. "You're in the same room you were in at New Year. Second floor, third on the left."

"Thanks Mum." Harry disappeared off in the direction his mother had indicated. Only once he was in the privacy of the room, which had obviously been redecorated, did he relax. He still hated the idea of his Mum remarrying but after seeing her look so anxious just before hugging him, he knew that couldn't hurt her by telling her how he still felt. Besides, he'd promised Hermione that his days of throwing a tantrum were now a thing of the past.

Two days later

Harry stood outside Gringotts Bank, looking up at the large white building. "Am I supposed to do anything special?"

Remus shook his head. "They'll probably just need a sample of blood from you to confirm your identity."

Feeling nervous, Harry walked in behind Remus. Remus pulled Harry forward as he approached a goblin and informed him of what they wanted. "Harry Potter, Duke of Harbridge, and Remus Lupin to see Feldergam."

"This way." The goblin walked off briskly in the direction of a pair of silver encrusted doors, which he pushed open. "Please wait in here."

Harry walked apprehensively into the room, which was decorated with pictures of what he guessed must be goblin warriors. Remus put a hand on his shoulder. "Relax, Harry."

A few minutes later, a goblin entered the room from a side door, carrying a folder crammed full of papers. "Your Grace, Mr. Lupin. Please be seated. My name is Feldergam."

Harry sat down as close to Remus as he could. He didn't know why but the goblins made him feel very uncomfortable.

“Right, Your Grace. Am I correct in understanding that you want Mr. Lupin to have unfettered use of No.7 Grimmauld Square?” Feldergam opened the folder and took out a paper pertaining to the property.

“You are, Mr. Feldergam.” Harry hated having to use the Potter name and title for business transactions. “I’d also prefer it if you could call me 'Harry' rather than 'Your Grace'.”

Feldergam smiled, revealing his jagged teeth. “Harry, I need you to hold out your right hand.”

Harry did as he was told. Feldergam slid a ring onto Harry’s ring finger. “This is the Potter family ring. If you are the true head of house, then it will accept you. If not, the ring will vanish.”

Harry watched with bated breath as the ring shimmered and twisted, before resizing itself to fit his finger. “Do you need it back?”

Feldergam shook his head. “It is yours to keep now.” He reached into the folder again. “I have a letter here for you from your father.”

Displaying no emotion at Feldergam's announcement, Harry took the letter and slipped it into his pocket. “What happens now?”

“You just need to sign here.” Feldergam pointed to a blank line on the form under which Harry’s full name and title was set out. “Mr. Lupin will then have free use of the Grimmauld Square property together with any of the house-elves that pertain to it.”

Harry looked around for a quill, smiling gratefully when Feldergam produced one. “Sorry but do you have any ink?”

“It’s self-inking.” Feldergam hid a smirk.

Harry took the quill and began to sign his name, only for a stinging sensation to begin on the back of his hand. Harry realized that the quill was signing his name in blood on the parchment, and reproducing the same script on the back of his hand. Ignoring the pain, Harry finished signing. “Do I need to sign anywhere else?”

Feldergam was surprised that the boy hadn't complained; most purebloods and their children tended to be whiners. He hadn't expected James Potter's son to be any different. "That's the only signature required for this transaction."

Harry nodded politely. "Thank you for your time, Mr. Feldergam."

Feldergam returned the gesture. "If you see Valdek at the front desk, he'll give you the key to your property and to the ancillary vault which holds your trust fund. Once you reach seventeen, you will be able to access the other Potter family vaults." Feldergam informed Harry as he glanced once more through his papers. "However, if you wish to access them before that time, your father made allowance for a guardian to be appointed for you who may access them in your stead. He designated Albus Dumbledore but because you have now reached your thirteenth birthday and wear the Potter family ring, you may now choose your own guardian."

Harry frowned. "Has Albus Dumbledore accessed the Potter vaults up until now?"

Feldergam, who had reviewed the paperwork before meeting with Harry, shook his head. "No. Initially the notice of guardianship didn't go out to him because your mother was still alive. He therefore wasn't made aware of James Potter's appointment. A few months later, Albus Dumbledore, acting on behalf of Lily Potter, informed us that she no longer wanted custodial care of you but that your aunt and Mr. Lupin were going to assume that role. Their formal adoption of you meant that the vaults would just sit in abeyance until you reached thirteen, or such other time after then, when you could choose a guardian of your own. Mr. and Mrs. Lupin did, of course, have access to your trust account, should they have needed to purchase anything on your behalf."

Harry was relieved that Dumbledore hadn't been able to access any of the vaults. "Thank you for explaining. I believe I would like to appoint a different guardian at this time." He indicated his Dad with a nod of his head. "Mr. Lupin is to be my guardian."

Feldergam pulled out several forms, before addressing Remus. "Mr. Lupin, do you agree to become the formal guardian of Harry's family vaults until he reaches the age of seventeen or marries before that time?"

Remus didn't need a crystal ball to discern that Harry wanted to see inside the vaults and therefore agreed. "I do, Feldergam."

"In that case, I will need you both to sign all three forms." Feldergam passed Remus the same pen that Harry had used previously.

Remus signed all three forms in blood before passing the pen to Harry. Harry hid his dismay at having to sign more documents in his own blood and, gritting his teeth, signed his name in triplicate, trying not to flinch as the pain became more intense with each pen stroke he made. He then passed the pen back to Feldergam, together with the forms.

Feldergam looked them over. "Everything seems to be in order. Valdek will take you to the vaults if you wish to see them now, or will provide you with keys to them and the Grimmauld Square property if you wish to view them at a later time."

Harry bowed slightly to Feldergam. "Thank you again for your assistance, Mr. Feldergam."

Remus also bowed. "Feldergam."

"Mr. Lupin, Harry." Feldergam inclined his own head before leaving by the same doors he had come in through.

"Do you want to take a look at the vaults?" Remus asked, as he led Harry towards the teller Feldergam had told them would be able to help them.

Harry grinned. "Can we?"

Remus didn't say anything, and addressed Valdek. "I should like access to the Potter family vaults."

“Mr. Lupin, Harry. If you’d both follow me.” Valdek led them through a door to where a cart was waiting for them. “If you’d like to get in, Calkris will be along shortly.”

Harry wondered how this goblin knew that he didn’t want to be called ‘Your Grace’ as he hadn’t been in the room when he’d told Feldergam. Deciding that he’d ask Remus after they left, he climbed excitedly into the cart that Valdek had pointed out. Remus hid his smile at his son’s obvious enthusiasm.

A few minutes later Harry found himself standing inside the main Potter family vault. “Dad, look at all those books.”

Harry walked over to where several large bookcases were filled with various leather-bound tomes. Reaching out to touch one, Harry received a small shock. Calkris smirked. “Only Mr. Lupin may remove anything from the vault.

Harry looked pleadingly at Remus who walked over. “Pick which ones you want and I’ll shrink them for you.”

Harry spent the next twenty minutes picking out various books that looked interesting, before finally picking out a few on potions that he knew might be of interest to Hermione and Severus. “I think that’s it. We’ll have to come back and look round more next time. I’m a bit short on time and I want to look at the house before I go home. Uncle Grim is taking everyone out for a meal tonight to discuss the wedding.” Harry looked a little embarrassed at telling his Dad.

Remus simply shrank the books Harry had selected, before heading towards the exit. “Come on then. I don’t want your mother after me because you were late.”

Harry relaxed as he realized that Remus wasn’t upset by the news. “Do you think we can go any faster on the way back?”

Calkris usually told customers one speed only, but on seeing Remus’ slightly dismayed look, decided to treat the boy. “We can go as fast as you’d like.”

Remus hid his annoyance at the goblin and resignedly climbed into the cart. Harry jumped in beside him. "This is so much fun."

Remus said nothing as the cart pulled away at breakneck speed.

Ten minutes later, Harry and Remus could be seen standing on the doorstep of No.7 Grimmauld Square. Harry looked worriedly around. "What if the Muggles had seen us apparate in?"

"They know the houses exist, but they're unable to enter the area unless invited to do so by a wizard. Anything they see happening, they forget within a few minutes. This is a very influential area and is only patronized by the oldest purebloods and their families." Remus explained.

"Is it the same with Sirius' house?" Harry could see the houses of Grimmauld Place from where he was standing.

Remus shook his head. "They are mostly pureblood-owned homes, but they don't have the same charms and wards on them that these ones do."

An hour later, Harry sat down. "It's massive. Who needs such a big house?"

"It's a status symbol." Remus informed his son. "No-one really needs this much room. It's just a way of displaying how rich you are."

"And nobody needs eight house-elves, not even for a house of this size." Harry had been introduced to his 'staff' by the head house-elf, Gotobed when he'd arrived.

"You can't get rid of them except to another pureblood family. If you gave them clothes, then they'd just wither and die. They wouldn't be able to cope." Remus knew Harry didn't like the idea of owning so many house-elves. He also knew that Harry was probably going to be shocked when he eventually investigated his other properties, as they would more than likely be home to even more house-elves than this one.

Harry thought for a moment. "Is Uncle Grim a pureblood?"

Remus nodded. "A lesser one, but yes."

"Then I'm going to gift him a couple of the house-elves from here." Harry decided that Grim and his Mum might be the answer to the overabundance of house-elves Grimmauld Square currently had. "Uncle Grim's house-elf is rather old, and Mum could do with the extra help now that she's moved into Fable House. It's much bigger than Darcy Cottage."

"I'm sure they'll appreciate them." Remus knew that Nia certainly would anyway.

Harry called out. "Gotobed."

The elderly head of the household appeared in front of him. "Yes, Master Harry?"

"I should like to make a gift of some of the house-elves who work here. My mother is to marry a pureblood called Grimstock Lovegood, and I wish for the elves to be bound to him." Harry explained. "Can you pick out two for me?"

Gotobed bowed low. "Me's doing it at once, Master Harry."

Harry pulled a face after the elf disappeared. "I wish he were more like French."

"Most house-elves are like Gotobed." Remus grinned. "French is rather hard to beat though, isn't he?"

Harry nodded, before checking his wristwatch. "I think I'd better get back. Mum will be wondering where I've gotten to. I can floo from here can't I?"

Remus pulled out the floo powder he'd brought with him just in case they needed it. "I should think so. Let's find a fireplace."

After hugging his Dad, Harry stepped into the fireplace they'd discovered in the study. "I'll see you in a week. If you need any money for the house before then, you can just take it from the vaults."

"Have a nice time tonight." Remus ignored Harry's comment about the money, and watched as Harry threw down the floo power and vanished. Turning around, he decided to check out the library.

Harry arrived home and explained to Grimstock about the two elves that had suddenly appeared. "They're from my house in London. They're a gift for you and Mum."

Grimstock was pleased by Harry's gesture. "Thank you. I'm sure your Mum will be delighted to find them here when she gets back from the spa."

"I didn't know she was going out." Nia hadn't mentioned anything to Harry.

"I arranged it for her." Grimstock informed him. "She's taken all the girls with her. They're meeting up with Lily and her two as well."

"I bet they're having a good time then." Harry grinned at the thought of the noisy bunch the spa was going to be dealing with. "I bet the spa isn't too happy though."

Grim laughed. "I expect they'll be a lot happier when they see the size of the bank draft I gave Nia to cover everyone's treatments."

Harry laughed as well. "No doubt they will. I bet Mum was glad that Maman didn't go to Paris after all."

"That's quite the understatement. I expect the two of them are talking dresses as we speak." Grim could only imagine what was going on. "I think I'd better make a move and get ready. I don't want to keep everyone waiting. Dudley, Draco and Orion are upstairs if you want to see them."

Harry's face lit up. "Draco's here?"

"He is. Dudley was complaining about the number of women going tonight, so your Mum invited Draco to come along as well." Grim hadn't minded the additional guest. "As you can guess, Auri was practically doing cartwheels."

"Poor Draco. Auri still hasn't gotten over her crush on him." Harry headed towards the door, before hesitating. "Jamie's not up there is he?"

Grim shook his head. "Apparently he's gone to stay with one of his friends."

Harry hid his elation at Grim's news. "I'll just pop in and see Draco and Orion before getting ready."

"Don't forget, you need to be down here five minutes before seven as the portkey is set to go off at seven." Grim had approached the Ministry for an approved portkey to take them all to the same restaurant he'd taken Nia to when he'd proposed.

Harry looked astounded. "Mum's going by portkey?"

Grim shook his head. "I'm going to apparate her. Lily will escort you rowdy lot."

Harry was aware that Nia trusted only Grim to take her anywhere by wizarding transportation. "I'll make sure we're all ready on time."

"Off you go then. Times a moving." Grim waved Harry out of the room before leaving to get ready himself.

14th August 1994

Hermione ran to the front door as she heard the sound of a car approaching. From up in the sky, a light blue Ford Anglia suddenly lurched down towards the front of the house. The moment the car touched down, the front door shot open, and Severus got out. Hermione thought her father looked a little green. "Are you alright, Papa?"

"Can you see to our guests? I'll be back shortly." Severus called out, as he dashed past Hermione and into the house.

Hermione stood back as everyone started to climb out of the car. Spotting George she asked, "Where's Harry?"

"Right here." Harry had been stuck in the middle at the back of the car, and was subsequently the last person to get out. He walked over to Hermione and hugged her, before turning back to face the others. "Hermione Snape, I'd like you to meet Arthur and Andy Weasley, and their children, Bill, Nym, Charlie, and Artie."

Hermione felt a little overwhelmed at meeting so many people she didn't know at once. "Hello."

Andy smiled sympathetically at Hermione. "Hello Hermione. I've heard so much about you. It's nice to be able to put a face to the name at last."

Reacting to Andy's kind face, Hermione relaxed and smiled back. "It's nice to meet you too, Mrs. Weasley. Why doesn't everyone come in? Bright will take your luggage to your rooms. Mama should be down in a moment."

Everyone followed Hermione into the house where Harry introduced them all to Hermione's younger siblings and her mother before everyone departed to freshen up before dinner. After dinner, Harry, Hermione and George excused themselves, and headed off for the privacy of Hermione's bedroom.

Once there, Harry sat down on the chair closest to the fireplace which, despite the time of year, was flickering merrily away. "This doesn't give out any heat."

Before Harry could do anything, Hermione thrust her hand into the center of the fire. "It's just an illusion. I love the effect of the flames but it's too hot at this time of year for a real fire."

Harry wondered if he could have the same thing done at home. "I'll have to ask Uncle Grim to do the same for me."

George interrupted their discourse. "Now that we've solved the mystery of the magic fireplace, perhaps you might like to fill us in on how your summer has been?"

"Pretty exciting actually." Hermione was bubbling over with enthusiasm as she told Harry and George where she'd been. "Papa took everyone along with him when he had a potions convention in Los Angeles. We got to spend two weeks there."

Harry felt a small tinge of jealousy. He'd wanted to visit the States ever since Nic and Peri had told him all about their travels. "You didn't say anything in your letters. What was it like?"

"I didn't want to say anything as I wanted to surprise you." Hermione reached up and grabbed something off her dresser as she answered Harry's questions. "It was certainly very different there. American wizards talk very differently from us, and I've never heard of some of the spells they used."

Harry was hanging off the edge of his seat. "It sounds as if you had fun."

"I really enjoyed the conferences that I was allowed to attend with Papa. But I couldn't go to all of them as Mama wanted to spend some time with me as well. One day she took us all out to Disneyland but it wasn't my thing, although Bas and Livvy really enjoyed it." Hermione hadn't particularly liked the crowds or the lines that had seemed to go on forever to ride anything.

"Did you do anything else while you were there?" George was just as interested as Harry in what Hermione had been up to.

Hermione nodded. "We all did a Muggle tour of the city when Papa had a day away from the conference. I'm so glad I don't have to live somewhere like that. There's far too many vehicles on the road." Hermione shuddered. "It makes me glad we can apparate and floo."

"What did the American wizards look like?" Harry asked.

Hermione showed the two boys the wizarding photo she'd picked up off her dresser. "I thought you might want to see, so I took a photograph."

Harry and George were disenchanted to see that their American counterparts looked a lot like them. "Well, that's a bit disappointing." Harry pulled a face. "When you said that they talked so differently, I expected them to look different too."

"Sorry to disappoint you, but as you can see, they look exactly like we do." After putting the photo back, Hermione changed the subject. "So what news have you two got for me?"

"Fred is engaged to Daphne." George informed Hermione. "He's staying with her parents this week. There's going to be a formal celebration for them this weekend."

Hermione reached out to her dresser again, and grabbed a creamy piece of card off it. "I know. She sent me an invitation."

"Are you going?" George asked.

Hermione nodded. "I've already accepted. Are you going, Harry?"

Harry shook his head. "I can't. I'm going to Paris with Maman and Sirius. They were supposed to be going at the start of the term but Sirius couldn't make it, so they changed it to this week. I've got to leave here earlier than I intended to."

Hermione looked disappointed at Harry's news. "When have you got to go?"

"The seventeenth; we'll be gone for a week." Harry could see that Hermione wasn't very happy with what he was telling her.

"That's only three days from now." Hermione couldn't help the slightly whiny tone that had crept into her voice.

George smiled consolingly. "I'm pleased to say that you've got me for a lot longer. I won't be going home until the night of the engagement ball. Who are you going with?"

"If you mean a partner, then no-one. I was planning on asking Harry to accompany me." Hermione informed George.

"Would you like to go with me instead?" George pulled a face. "Fred tried to talk me into partnering Astoria but there was no way I was accompanying a second year to something like that."

Harry and Hermione giggled, before Hermione nodded. "We can do each other a favor and go together."

George let out a relieved sigh. "Thank goodness. At least Fred might lay off nagging me now."

"Who else is going from school that we know?" Harry asked, sounding a little subdued.

George tried to remember exactly who had been invited. "Nott, Goyle, Crabbe; the usual suspects. I think Daphne's parents invited them, rather than Daphne herself. Ron, Ginny, and Percy. There are some others from Slytherin, but I can't recall who at the moment."

Being nosey, Hermione asked after George's siblings. "Who are your brothers and Ginny taking?"

"Ginny's taking Blaise, and Percy's taking his fiancée, Penny. Guess who little Ronnie is taking." George knew that they probably wouldn't get it right.

"You mean he's not taking Lavender?" Harry was intrigued by George's comment.

"He broke it off with her a few weeks ago." George waited a few moments before dramatically informing them of the identity of Ron's mystery date. "He's taking Pansy Parkinson."

"Pansy Parkinson?" Hermione couldn't believe it. "Since when did they get together?"

"Because his Dad called off the trip to Paris, Jamie went to stay with Ron instead. Apparently Cho decided to visit as well, bringing Pansy over with her. A few weeks later Ron dumped Lavender." George had a feeling that Jamie had had something to do with his brother's decision.

"Great." Harry pulled a face. "Now my two ex-girlfriends are dating the two people I think I dislike most in the world." He glanced apologetically at George as he remembered Ron was George's brother. "Sorry."

George shrugged. "I know he's my brother but he's a pain in the ass. You're quite entitled to think about him however you want to."

Hermione suddenly had a horrible thought. "I hope Daphne's parents don't put us on a table with them."

George shook his head. "Put us lowly beings on the same table as the Boy Who Lived and his sidekick? Never."

Hermione grinned. "You're probably right."

Harry got up. "I think it's time I went to bed. I've been up since five this morning thanks to George here."

Hermione looked enquiringly at George. "What were you doing to him?"

"Snoring." George beamed happily at Harry. "I also hid his wand so he couldn't perform a silencing spell on me or get out of the room. It will teach young Harry here not to laugh at other people's misfortunes."

"That's not all he did. He made sure I couldn't wake him. Every time I stepped onto the floor, it gave me a small shock." Harry pulled a face at George. "His final gift to me was setting up a silencing spell around

my bed, so that noise could get in, but not out, so that I couldn't yell at him. I was stuck until he woke up."

Hermione couldn't hide her amusement at Harry's misfortune, and gave a little giggle. "So what did you do to George?"

Harry explained to her what had led to his lack of sleep. "Fred sent him a trick letter for refusing to go to the ball with Astoria. It turned George into a girl for a couple of hours. When he tried to undo the charm, he ended up in a wedding gown. He told me to shut up but I couldn't stop laughing at him. He's lucky the charm wore off before he had to go into work with his Dad."

Hermione burst out laughing. "I'm sorry George but it is funny."

George gave an evil smile. "Yeah. Yeah. Laugh it up, Snape. You want to remember that I'm still going to be here after Harry heads off for the delights of Paris."

Hermione immediately stopped laughing. George was renowned for getting his own back, as his snoring trick with Harry proved. "Let me walk you to your rooms."

George smirked at Harry as Hermione led the way out of her bedroom. Hermione escorted George to his room before continuing on up the corridor with Harry. Harry turned to her at the door. "Do you want to come in for a minute?"

Hermione nodded. "If you're not too tired."

"I am but I want to show you something." Harry led the way into his room and opened his trunk, which was sitting at the bottom of the bed. Lifting up his clothing, he pulled out the letter he'd received from James Potter. "When I went to Gringotts to sort out my house in London for Dad, Feldergam gave me this."

Hermione was torn between asking about the goblin, and reading the letter. However, on seeing Harry's expectant face, she opened up the letter.

“Dear Harry,

Right now I'm watching you play happily with Jamie on the floor, so it's hard to believe that if you ever get to read this letter, then I shall be dead. Right now we're in hiding from a wizard known as Lord Voldemort. I just pray that by the time you receive this letter, he is dead and you are living a happy life.

My main purpose in writing this letter is to set out my wishes and concerns for you all. Harry, as my heir, I'm leaving you everything except for a small sum of money I've placed into a trust fund for your brother. Please take care of Jamie and any other children I may have had since writing this letter. Unfortunately I cannot leave your mother any of the Potter funds or homes as they can only pass to my heir and other children, so please look after Lily for me. I'd like for her to be able to live in the Dower House on the Potter Estate. I've asked Feldergam from Gringotts Bank to deal personally with you on these matters, as he has been our family's administrator for the last ten years.

You will, of course, inherit several titles. The most important title, Duke of Harbridge, will mean that you will have a hereditary seat on the Wizengamot once you turn seventeen. At that time, you will be one of the richest and most powerful holders of such a seat; I suggest you use it well. Should you require guidance, know that you can turn to Albus Dumbledore. He has been a good friend and mentor to me for quite some time, and you should know that if you're ever in trouble, you can go to him for help, as I trust him implicitly.

There are also two family heirlooms which I'm leaving to you. The first is my invisibility cloak; I've placed it with Albus for safekeeping. He will pass it on to you if you show him this letter. The second is the Potter family ring which you should have received from Feldergam. It has several attributes which only you can utilize.

The ring has a built-in portkey; the current password is Tiger Lily. If you wish to reset it, then you need to activate the ring, which will take you to the Potter Estate, and place your hand on the lodestone that is inset into the gates. It will identify you as the next heir. All you then need do is state your full name and the new password. The ring also

has a couple of built-in protections. It will shield you from the majority of stunning spells, and it's also a bezoar, which will save you from most poisons. Just swallow the ring and it will go to work before reappearing back on your finger.

I hope to be able to tell you this and more in person, but if I cannot, my son, then know that my love will always be with you.

Your father,

James Potter”

Hermione felt a lump in her throat. “Oh Harry.”

Harry couldn't quite meet Hermione's eyes. “I read it and felt nothing.”

Hermione was stunned. “But this is from your birth father.”

Harry shrugged. “James Potter is just a name to me. I know I should feel more for him; he died to save me and Jamie after all, but I don't. Remus is my Dad and it's hard for me to think of anyone else in the same way.”

“What about Lily?” Hermione asked.

“That's different. She's not someone who I can't ever remember meeting.” Harry felt horrible about James but he couldn't help the way he felt. “I haven't shown the letter to anyone else except Dad.”

“Did you tell him how you felt?” Hermione passed the letter back to Harry.

Harry nodded. “He said that it was a shame that I didn't get the chance to know James Potter better. He showed me some memories of them from school.”

“And?” Hermione prompted softly when Harry stopped talking.

“I still felt nothing.” Harry looked ashamed. “I don't think I ever will.”

"It doesn't make you a bad person." Hermione had gotten over her initial shock at Harry's comment. "I don't really have any feelings towards my biological father either but I'm not sure how I'd react if I received a letter from him. Will you show this to Lily?"

Harry sat down. "No. I don't want to have to explain why I feel the way I do. But I wanted you to see it."

Hermione felt warm inside at Harry's words. "Thanks." She then asked about something she'd seen in the letter. "Are you going to get your invisibility cloak from Dumbledore?"

Harry shook his head. "I've got a feeling he's already passed it on to someone else."

Hermione frowned as she worked out who Harry meant. "Potter, I presume. Will you get it back from him?"

"I don't know what I'll do." Harry looked down at the letter. "I'm more concerned that James trusted Dumbledore. He'd even made Dumbledore the guardian of the Potter vaults until I reached thirteen. Thankfully that was negated when Mum and Dad adopted me."

"James obviously had no idea of what Dumbledore was truly like." Hermione hoped that what she was saying was true.

"I don't know. I've got the feeling he knew exactly what Dumbledore was like. Don't ask me why I think that. I know I've got no hard evidence except for what's written in this letter." Harry had felt a shiver run down his spine the first time he'd read the sentence about trusting Dumbledore. "Dad disagreed with me. He said that the Potters have always been friendly with Dumbledore and that James probably had no idea as to Dumbledore's true nature."

"Perhaps Remus is right." Hermione didn't know what else to think. "Why don't you ask Lily?"

"Then I'd have to show her the letter." Harry shook his head. "It doesn't really matter now anyway as James has been dead for years."

Hermione tried to get Harry to change his mind. "I really think you should reconsider showing it to Lily."

When Harry shook his head again, Hermione changed the subject. "Are you looking forward to Paris?"

Harry pulled a face. "Potter is going, so no. He's taking Cho with him. Maman cajoled Sirius into letting her come along."

Hermione looked sympathetic. "I can't say I'd be looking forward to it either with that pair going. I can't believe Lily agreed to let Cho go, especially as she knows how Cho treated you."

Harry shrugged. "I told her I didn't care, so she took me at my word. Sirius, however, felt differently. Maman told me she had to work on him for two days, before he finally gave in and said yes. Cho and Potter will probably ignore me anyway." Harry yawned.

Hermione got up. "I'll let you get some sleep."

"Before you go, I've got something for you." Harry walked back over to his trunk and pulled out four shrunken potion volumes. "I got them out of the main Potter vault. I don't know whether you've read them or not, but the titles weren't familiar to me."

Hermione looked interestedly at the books, her face growing in excitement as she read each title. "I haven't got any of these." Throwing her arms around Harry's neck, she kissed him on the cheek. "Thank you so much. I'll return them once I've finished reading them."

"They're for you to keep." Harry covered his hands at Hermione's squeal.

Hermione ran a hand over the top book. "I can't wait to show these to Papa." Harry yawned again, making Hermione frown. "I'm sorry, I should go."

"Sorry Hermione, but I really am tired." Harry smiled half-heartedly at his friend. "Thanks for listening to me."

“What else are friends for?” Hermione hugged Harry again.
“Goodnight, Harry.”

“Night, Hermione.” Harry closed the door after Hermione had left, and looked at the letter once more, before shoving it back under the clothing in his trunk.

The next morning

Harry awoke to find George sitting on a chair watching him. “What are you doing in here?”

“I couldn’t sleep, and I wanted to speak to you before we go down for breakfast.” George actually looked serious for once in his life.

“What is it?” Harry struggled to wake up properly.

“It’s about Hermione.” George blushed. “I want to know how you really feel about her.”

Now fully awake, Harry sat up. “What do you mean?”

“I know I’m taking Hermione to Fred’s bash as a friend but I want to ask her out on an actual date.” George felt a little uncomfortable telling this to Harry. “But I don’t want to do it if she’s already seeing you.”

“Hermione’s engaged to someone else.” Harry pointed out. “She’s hardly going to be going out with me.”

“I can’t see that lasting. I saw Hermione’s so-called fiancé out with Professor Jameson yesterday afternoon when I went with Dad into work. They looked pretty cozy to me.” George informed Harry.

“Dae and Anna?” Harry laughed. “They’re nothing more than friends.”

“So you usually kiss your friends without coming up for air, do you?” George sounded a little sarcastic.

Harry frowned. "Are you sure it was them?"

George nodded. "Definitely. The only difference was that our lovely professor had dyed her hair blonde."

Harry was perplexed. He'd known that Dae and Anna were good friends after the time they'd spent together at Dae's house but now he wondered if there had been more going on than he'd noticed. "Where did you see them?"

"Muggle London. They were in Hyde Park together. When Dad got into work, he had to go out on a case and took me with him. I was going to tell you yesterday, but with the mad rush to get ready to come here, I didn't get the chance." George had gone with his Dad to see if working in a Muggle related job would be of interest to him when he left school.

"I'm sure there's a good explanation as to why they were together." Harry brushed aside what George had told him. "Anyway, I think it's time I got up and went down to breakfast."

"You're not getting out of talking about Hermione that easily." George redirected the conversation back to Harry's feelings. "Do you like Hermione or not?"

Harry went extremely red. "Of course I do. She's my best friend."

George shook his head. "Wrong answer. Now tell me truthfully, Harry. Do you have any feelings for Hermione?"

Harry sighed. "Yes, if you really must know, I do. But as I've already said, she's engaged to Dae."

"Big deal. I was already willing to ignore the fact that she was engaged to him before I spotted Venant with Professor Jameson." George had a warning for Harry. "I wouldn't hang around telling her how you feel if I was you. If I'm willing to ignore the fact she's already engaged, then you can bet that there are others out there who are going to do the same."

Harry frowned. "Do you really think so?"

George nodded. "I do."

Harry decided to open up to George. "We've already kissed but decided afterwards that we'd be better off just being friends."

George's jaw dropped. "You never said anything."

"It was quite a while ago." Harry ran a hand through his hair, which was flopping around his face. "Then after we were attacked at Hogsmeade, I changed my mind about just being friends and decided to ask her out again, but could never seem to find the right time or the courage to do it."

"I'll help you along." George grinned at Harry. "If you don't ask her out before you leave, then I'm going to ask her to go out with me."

Harry scowled at George. "You wouldn't?"

"Yes, Harry, I would." George decided to be equally candid with Harry. "You're not the only one who likes Hermione. I didn't want to blunder in if there was already something going on between the two of you. However, you've just told me that there isn't, so if you don't ask her out, then I will."

Harry hated being backed into a corner. "Be my guest then. I'm not going to be pushed into asking Hermione out just to stop you from doing the same thing. Anyway, she might say no to you."

George smiled confidently. "And she might say yes."

Harry couldn't help himself; he laughed at George's swagger as the boy got up and walked towards the door. Knowing how close they'd become during the time they'd spent at Dae's house, Harry was pretty certain that Hermione would turn George down; at least he hoped she would. "Good luck, George."

George pulled open the door. "I don't need luck. I've inherited the Weasley charm."

Harry threw a pillow at George, hitting the door instead as George swiftly closed the door behind him.

After George left, Harry chewed on his bottom lip as he pondered George's sighting of Dae and Anna together. Deciding that it could wait until he saw his Dad again, he picked up his clothes and headed into the bathroom.

25th August 1994

Harry stepped into the small tent that Sirius had erected. "Wow, this is great." Inside the tent it was a lot larger than it looked from the outside. In fact it looked more like a large apartment. "This is just like the Tardis."

At Sirius' frown, Harry explained the Muggle reference before wandering into one of the rooms off the main sitting area. "Great. There's even a kitchen."

Lily grabbed him by the arm. "Which you can keep out of it. I know you enjoy trying to cook but I'd quite like to keep the tent in one piece."

Harry blushed. Normally he was a fairly decent cook, having been taught by Nia. However, when Lily had let him experiment in her kitchen at home, he had forgotten about the ginger snaps he'd put in the oven and had subsequently set fire to it. "Don't worry, I'm in no rush to do any cooking. Anyway, your cooking tastes far better than mine."

Lily looked pleased at Harry's comment. "Now we've decided who's going to be doing the cooking, you might want to investigate the bedrooms. Harry, you and Orion will be sharing, if that's okay with you. Cassie and Scarlett will also be sharing, leaving the smallest bedroom for Anna. Sirius and I will sleep in the den. "I'm afraid there are only two bathrooms, so you'll have to share with Cassie and Scarlett. Anna can share with me and Sirius."

Harry didn't mind sharing with Cassie and Scarlett. He didn't think the two girls would mind either. They'd pretty much become inseparable, spending most of the holidays together either at Nia or Lily's home. Thankfully Jamie was staying with Ron and his family.

After settling in, Harry and Orion decided to take a walk around the campsite with Lily's warning to be careful ringing in their ears.

"I can't wait to start Hogwarts." Orion was excited at the prospect of joining his brother at school, and had already packed his trunk in anticipation of doing so. "I hope I get into Ravenclaw."

Harry knew that Orion had a serious case of hero worship that he'd directed at him. "I hope so too. It'll be great to show you around." Harry ruffled Orion's hair.

Orion beamed happily up at his big brother. He felt closer to Harry than he'd ever done to Jamie. "It's too bad that Anna is being allowed to go as well."

Anna had been allowed to join Hogwarts a year earlier than she should have done. Her teachers had said that she was exceptionally gifted magically and very intelligent to boot. She had quickly surpassed anything she could be taught at her current school, and Sirius had therefore petitioned the governors of Hogwarts to allow her to start sooner. Thankfully, for everyone's sanity, she'd been accepted, and Anna had given up whining about how unfair it would be if she was refused.

"She might not be in the same house as you." Harry pointed out. He didn't say anything to Orion, but he hoped she didn't make Ravenclaw.

"I hope you're right." Orion and Anna had reached a stage of mutual loathing, which had occurred mostly because of Harry. "She's not really speaking to me, and she's been really horrible about you."

Harry stopped. "Orion, you shouldn't fall out with Anna just because of me."

Orion shook his head. "It's not just you. She's always really mean to me and Cassie. I think she only loves Dad and Jamie."

Harry was shocked at Orion's comment. "I'm sure you're wrong."

"I'm not; she told Mum she hated her and Cassie. I already know she doesn't like me." Orion looked a little downcast about his revelation.

"People sometimes say things they don't mean in the heat of the moment." Harry knew he had. "I've done it myself and regretted it afterwards."

Orion disagreed. "Not Anna. Even though she's younger than me, she's picked on me and Cassie ever since I can remember, and she's always been rude to Mum."

Harry felt sorry for his brother. "She's probably just looking for attention."

"That's what Mum and Dad think. I overheard them talking about her." Orion blushed as he realized that he'd told Harry about his eavesdropping.

"I won't say anything." Harry was now interested to know what had gone on himself, but not wanting to pressure Orion chose to reassure his brother instead. "You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Orion looked round before saying anything. "Mum thinks that Anna is jealous of any interest that she and Dad pay to me and Cassie. Mum and Dad are trying for another baby but Mum's really worried about what Anna might do to a new baby."

"That's why Sirius pushed so hard for Anna to join Hogwarts early isn't it?" Harry deduced.

Orion nodded. "Mum's hoping that Anna might behave better once she's at school." Orion looked close to tears. "Anna burnt Cassie a few months ago. I then caught her punching Cassie last week. Anna threatened to carry on doing it if I told anyone what she'd done."

Harry could see that Orion was pretty upset by what was happening. "I think you should talk to Maman and tell her what's been going on. She'll understand why you haven't told her what happened before now."

Orion looked scared. "I'm frightened at what Anna will do if I do that."

"You don't have to tell her then." Harry decided to take the burden from his brother. "Don't get worrying anymore, I'll deal with it."

Orion felt his legs go wobbly with relief at Harry's statement. "Really?"

"Really." Harry took his brother by the shoulders. "Orion, I want you to know that you can always come to me if you have a problem and don't think you can go to your parents."

Orion flung his arms around Harry's waist and buried his face into his brother's chest, before stepping back and wiping away a few tears. "Thanks, Harry."

Harry slung his arm around Orion's shoulders. "Now we've got that sorted, why don't we go find George and have a look around this place?"

"I'd like that." Orion was in no hurry to return to their tent. He looked round at the various tents that covered the landscape. "It's a shame Draco couldn't see this."

"Well, if little Lizzie hadn't decided to arrive a week early, then he would have." Narcissa had gone into labor two days previously and her daughter, Elisabeth Narcissa Lily Delaney, had arrived early yesterday morning. Draco had firecalled Harry and regretfully cancelled attending the world cup with them. Harry hadn't been surprised as he could tell that Draco was already smitten with the little sister he'd christened Lizzie.

Orion and Harry both looked up as a voice called Harry's name. Orion watched as a tall redhead loped over to where they were standing. "Hi guys. It's amazing isn't it?"

Orion immediately decided that he liked the newcomer. "Where are you pitched?"

George pointed to a ratty looking tent at the end of the field. "Over there. It's small outside but a lot bigger inside and it smells a lot like cats."

Orion laughed. "Our tent is bigger on the inside as well but it doesn't smell like cats."

"Lucky you." George beamed at the small boy. "Do you want to come and meet my Dad?"

Orion suddenly became shy. "Maybe later. We're just going to look at the other tents." George fell into step with the two boys as they walked along.

"So, how did the engagement ball go?" Harry really wanted to ask about Hermione.

"It was boring. I'm just glad that Hermione was with me." George knew what Harry was actually angling after.

"Did she have a good time?" Harry couldn't bring himself to ask if Hermione had accepted George's offer.

"With me of course she did." George smirked evilly at Harry. "I should tell you that you're no longer looking at a single man."

Harry felt his heart sink. "So she said yes then?"

George took pity on him. "No, she didn't. She turned me down politely, saying that she was engaged to someone else and couldn't possibly go out with me."

Harry couldn't stop the smile that spread across his face. "So who are you going out with then?"

"Katie Bell." George informed him. "She was at the party as well. It turns out that her mother is good friends with Daphne's mother; she

ended up seated next to me. As Hermione spent most of the evening talking to Nott about some potion or other, Katie was more than happy to keep me occupied. I therefore asked her out at the end of the night, and she said yes.”

“I’m really pleased for you.” Letting go of Orion, Harry clapped George on the back.

“I’ll bet you are.” George put his own arm around Orion. “So, young Orion, do you have any girlfriends you might like to tell your brother and me about?”

Orion pulled a face. “No!”

The two boys laughed at the obvious disgust Orion was feeling at George’s question. George winked at Harry before addressing Orion again. “You’ll change your mind eventually.”

“I don’t think so.” Orion shuddered. His experience of girls outside of the family was limited to his schoolfriends, Harry’s friend Hermione, and Cho. If they were anything like Cho, then he didn’t ever want anything to do with them. “Come on, I want to see the tents.”

With that, the three of them set off to look at the myriad of tents that now littered the fields as far as the eye could see.

Later that evening

Orion babbled happily to Harry as they walked in front of Sirius, Jamie and the Weasleys on the way back to their tents.

After saying goodnight to Jamie, Sirius caught up with the two boys. “So what did you think of your first quidditch match?”

Orion grinned up at his Dad. “It was amazing. I want to be able to fly that like that.”

Sirius ruffled his son’s hair. “I don’t think your mother would like to hear that.”

Orion was well aware of how his mother felt about quidditch. "Then I won't tell her."

Harry passed over the small model of Viktor Krum that he'd bought when Orion hadn't been watching. "I've got a little something you can show Maman. I got one for Cassie as well as she couldn't come with us."

Orion was ecstatic. "Look Dad. It's Krum."

"I can see that. Don't you think you ought to thank your brother?" Sirius gently admonished his son.

Orion blushed. "Sorry, Harry. Thanks."

Harry knew that Orion had been grateful but in his excitement had forgotten to say thank you. "Anytime."

Lily heard voices and opened up the tent flap. "You're just in time. I've made hot chocolate and cookies."

Orion shot into the tent. Harry grinned at Sirius. "I take it Orion likes hot chocolate and cookies?"

"Just a little." Sirius was pretty partial himself. "Lily, don't you think it's a little warm for hot chocolate?"

Lily shook her head. "The girls wanted some."

"You did bring some beer didn't you?" Despite the children's tastes, it was a warm night and Sirius wanted nothing more than something cold to drink.

"Of course. I'll get you one." Lily looked at Harry. "What would you like to drink?"

"Can I have a shandy please?" Remus had introduced him to the half beer, half lemonade drink when they'd stayed at Dae's.

Lily of course knew about this, and acquiesced. "I'll be right back with your drinks."

Harry sat on a chair outside of the tent, and Sirius sat down on the ground beside him. Both of them drank thirstily from their glasses once Lily returned with them. "I'm going to keep an eye on the children. Don't stay up too late." Lily kissed them both goodnight and went back into the tent.

"Tell me Harry. Have you made up your mind yet about what you want to do when you leave you school?" Sirius asked.

Harry thought for a moment before answering. "Dad took me around the wizing section of the British Museum when I stopped with him during the holidays. While I was there I spoke to some of the guides and researchers. I'm rather interested in something in the field of archeology but I'm not sure what yet."

Sirius appeared surprised. "I half expected you to say Auror. Remus said that you received the highest ever recorded marks in Defense for a third year. I'd say you'd do pretty well in that line of work."

Harry blushed. "I did think about it. I enjoy dueling but I just can't imagine myself doing that sort of thing as a job."

"What about a healer?" Sirius asked after his own profession.

Harry knew that was one area he had no interest in. "I'm afraid it just doesn't appeal to me."

Sirius shrugged. "It's not for everyone. Cassie has been telling me she wants to be a healer even since she was tiny. I'm not sure if she really wants to or if it's because of me."

Harry knew the little girl idolized her father. "I think it's probably because of you. She might change her mind as she gets older." Harry already knew that Orion was convinced he was going to be a professional quidditch player but he didn't really have any idea as to Anna. "What about Anna?"

“She wants to be a spell and charm developer, like Lily. She’s certainly got the smarts, so I’m not really concerned about her future career plans.” Sirius could tell that something about Anna was troubling Harry. “Is something bothering you?”

Harry nodded. “Can you erect a privacy bubble?”

Sirius did as he was asked. “Now tell me, what’s the problem?”

Harry filled Sirius in on what Orion had told him. “He was too scared to tell anyone.”

Sirius didn’t look very happy at what Harry had told him. “After discussing Anna’s behavior towards the other children, we’ve decided to put off trying for a baby for a while.” Sirius sighed. “We’re hoping that Hogwarts and its discipline will help to settle Anna down.”

Harry could see that Sirius was at a loss on how to deal with Anna. “Have you tried spanking her?”

Sirius nodded. “As much as I hate to admit it, yes, I have. I always swore I’d never smack any of the girls, but like Orion, I caught her hurting Cassie a few days ago.”

“Did it work?” Harry was hoping that it had.

“I don’t know.” Sirius smiled ruefully. “However, I’ve never seen her so shocked. She ended up crying and promising that she wouldn’t do it again.” Sirius took a mouthful of his beer before continuing. “Lily tried to tell me about Anna, but I was so pissed at her about the amount of time she was spending at work that I didn’t want to listen.”

“At least you’re listening now.” Harry tried to console Sirius.

“I should have done it earlier.” Sirius smiled at Harry, and changed the subject. “So how would you feel about a new brother or sister?”

“I would love it.” Harry reassured Sirius. “I felt a little jealous when Draco was telling me all about his new sister.”

Sirius had been about to respond to Harry's comment when a scream sounded through the campground. He shot to his feet. "What was that?"

Harry stood as well. He could see a small crowd in the distance heading their way. Suddenly light illuminated the group as a tent was set on fire. Harry gasped. "Death Eaters."

Sirius dropped the privacy bubble and grabbed Harry by the shoulder. "Get Lily and the children and head into the woods. I don't want them trapped inside the tent."

"What about you?" Harry was worried that Sirius was going to try and stop what was happening.

"I'm going to see if anyone needs medical help." Sirius pushed Harry towards the tent. "Now go."

Harry dashed into the tent. "Maman, get the girls and Orion up. We've got a problem."

Lily had been reading with the girls and, hearing the urgency in Harry's voice, didn't stop to question him. "Put your shoes on and follow me."

A little scared, the two girls slipped into their shoes and picked up their cloaks. Anna, looking sulky, was standing with Orion and Harry. "What's going on?"

Harry whispered into Lily's ear. "Death Eaters. We need to get into the woods. Sirius has gone to see if anyone needs help."

Lily turned to the children. "There's trouble outside; some people have been drinking too much. We need to go into the woods for a little while." She saw Anna about to argue. "Anna, for once in your life, just shut up and do as you are told."

Anna recognized that Lily was really worried and immediately fell silent. The small group then left the tent with Lily leading and Harry following up the rear. Harry could see that the Death Eaters were now

not much more than a hundred feet away. He called out to the children. "Hold hands."

All the children did as they were told, the two youngest trying hard not to cry as they had also seen the masked group that was heading their way. Lily turned back to Harry. "I'm going to apparate the girls out of here. Stay with Orion and I'll return for the two of you. Head into the woods; I'll meet you there."

Harry watched as Lily and the three girls disappeared, before taking Orion's hand and dragging him into the woods. Finding a small crop of bushes, Harry pushed Orion into the center of them. No more than a few seconds had gone by when a Death Eater Harry recognized strode into the clearing. Even though he was frightened, Harry knew he had to protect his younger brother, so he stood his ground with his wand drawn.

"My, my, Harry Lupin." Amicus' voice sent shivers down Harry's spine.

"It's Amicus, isn't it?" Harry's casual tone hid the fear he was feeling.

"You know who I am?" Amicus didn't move any closer.

Harry nodded. "It's hard to forget someone who nearly killed my Dad."

"He told you about that, did he?" Amicus sounded surprised.

Harry simply nodded, and began backing away from the bush Orion was hiding in. Amicus immediately spotted what Harry was trying to avert his attention from. "Stupefy."

Without looking down, Harry knew that Amicus had stunned his brother. "Why didn't you kill him?"

"I have no interest in the boy." Knowing his actions had perplexed Harry, Amicus grinned behind his mask. "Now, where were we? Oh yes, we were discussing your father. Did he tell you why he was allowed to live?"

“What do you mean, allowed to live?” Harry kept moving away from the bush; if Amicus started throwing spells at him, he didn’t want Orion being hit accidentally.

“Come now, Harry.” Amicus lowered his wand. “Surely you must know what your Dad is?”

“I don’t know what you mean.” Harry’s reddening face, however, gave him away.

“Don’t lie to me.” Amicus’ tone became sharp. “I’m being candid with you, so I expect the same courtesy back.”

Harry couldn’t understand why Amicus didn’t just attack him. “Fine, then yes, I do know what he is.”

“That’s better.” Amicus lifted his wand. “Tell me, Harry. Is there any chance you’ll be following in his footsteps?”

“Hardly.” Harry couldn’t keep the disgust out of his voice. “Why would I want to join a side who tortures their own followers?”

Amicus sighed. “That’s a pity, as I quite like you, Harry.”

Harry felt his stomach drop as he watched Amicus’ stance change. “Lucky me.”

Amicus laughed at Harry’s cynicism. “It’s going to be a shame to kill you.”

“If you actually succeed.” Harry wondered what was taking Lily so long.

“What do you mean by that?” Amicus snapped.

“Who’s to say that you’re going to be able to kill me?” Harry now felt very afraid, despite his bravado. “You didn’t manage to kill my Professor.”

Amicus didn't like being reminded of his failure. "Which is something I intend to correct the next time we meet."

Harry didn't bother answering as he sent a stunning spell towards the Death Eater, who easily dispelled it. Unused to the speed that Amicus employed in dealing with both dispelling Harry's curse, and responding with one of his own, Harry was caught off guard. Not moving quickly enough, he yelped as the spell grazed his arm, ripping a huge chunk of flesh off it. Trying to ignore the pain, he sent another stunning spell at Amicus who, once again, easily defended against it.

Amicus laughed at Harry's efforts. "Third year spells aren't going to do you any good, Harry."

Harry heard a crack behind him and looked round to find Lily standing there. "Maman, get down."

Lily dropped to the floor as a sickly yellow curse flew over her head.

Trying to divert Amicus' attention from Lily, Harry let a curse fly towards the Death Eater who easily batted it aside, and sent a curse of his own back towards Harry. "So, you're not on your own."

"Leave her alone." Harry threw up a shield, and Amicus' low level spell bounced harmlessly off it.

"And if I don't?" Amicus taunted Harry as he threw up a shield to stop the more potent spell that Lily had sent his way.

Knowing that he probably wasn't going to live through this, and not wanting Lily and Orion to be condemned to the same fate, Harry ignored the Death Eater and called out to Lily. "Maman, get ready to take Orion and go."

Amicus shook his head. "I don't think so, Harry. I'll kill her the moment she takes a step towards the boy."

Not expecting it, it was Amicus' turn to be caught off guard, as Harry transformed and covered the distance between himself and the Death

Eater in one leap. Amicus dropped his wand as he found himself flat on his back, face to face with an angry wolf.

Hearing a sharp crack from behind him, Harry knew that Lily must have used the diversion to get Orion out. He just hoped she wouldn't return to try and rescue him.

Amicus shifted beneath Harry. "I suggest you get off me right now before you live to regret it."

Harry ignored Amicus' warning and growled low in his throat. His jaw was now just inches from Amicus' throat; Harry really wanted to rip it out but was unable to bring himself to do so. Suddenly two Death Eaters burst into the clearing. Knowing that he'd was outnumbered and in grave danger of being attacked, Harry growled at Amicus one final time, before darting off into the deeper brush of the woods.

Amicus rolled quickly to his feet and, after grabbing his wand, sent a curse hurtling after the wolf. He knew he'd hit his mark when a yelp reached his ears. Before turning to face the other two Death Eaters, he invoked several wards which would only allow anyone with the Dark Mark to apparate or portkey into the area. He then turned his attention to the Death Eaters. "What do you think you were doing out there?"

"Having a little fun." The taller of the two responded. "What's the use of being a Death Eater if you can't enjoy yourself?"

"Crucio." Amicus watched coolly as the Death Eater he recognized as Matthews, a new recruit, screamed and writhed on the floor until he began to vomit. "The Dark Lord said he would announce when he had returned, not you. This was supposed to be a simple kidnapping operation; something you obviously forgot."

The second Death Eater, Eveready, knew Amicus wasn't going to be happy when he told him they'd failed. "We couldn't get near the boy. Arthur Weasley and his wife interfered."

"Why didn't you kill them?" Amicus asked quietly.

“They began yelling for the others to get out. They all portkeyed out of there before we could do anything.” Matthews explained, as he lay on the floor. “Then, when people began coming out of their tents to see what was going on, Eveready said that as Potter had escaped and we had nothing better to do, we might as well have a little fun.”

Amicus ignored Matthew's comment about having a little fun. “Didn't anyone think about erecting anti-apparition and portkey wards before going in?”

“I thought he had.” Eveready put the blame firmly on Matthews.

Amicus could feel his anger growing. “Where are the others now?”

Despite what he'd heard about Amicus, Eveready wasn't exactly impressed by the Death Eater standing in front him, and let his tone show the lack of respect he felt for the man. “They apparated out when the crowd of people grew larger.”

Amicus couldn't believe that these two had been so stupid as to remain; particularly after they'd been instructed specifically not to do so if anything went wrong. “Why didn't you leave with the others as you were told?”

Matthews got up and folded his arms. “We heard a commotion in here, and decided to investigate.”

From his belligerent attitude, Amicus could tell that this man too, didn't appreciate how much danger he was in from him, in spite of having just been subjected to the Cruciatus curse. “You should have both left the moment you failed.”

“It's a good job we didn't, or that wolf would have ripped your throat out.” Eveready foolishly pointed out. “I thought you were supposed to be invincible.”

“Which is more than I can say for you.” Amicus turned his wand on the Death Eater. “Avada Kedavra.”

Knowing that he should have listened to the rumors and not to Eveready, Matthews began to shake as he observed how casually Amicus had dispatched his colleague. "Please don't kill me."

"If I find out that one word has escaped about the wolf, then you'll be sorry you were..." Amicus began, only to stop in mid-sentence. "Why take the chance? Avada Kedavra." Amicus then threw portkeys onto the bodies of the two Death Eaters. He knew that, despite the rumors that would spring up from the sightings of Death Eaters that night, his Master wouldn't want evidence being left behind.

After dealing with the bodies, Amicus vanished the dirt he'd picked up from being attacked by Harry. He was aware that the Dark Lord was going to be furious at the Death Eaters' failure to acquire their target. He shook his head. He still couldn't believe that eight Death Eaters had failed to best one couple and a bunch of children. He should have done it himself.

From deep in the woods, a howl reached his ears. He debated going in after the boy but he knew that it wouldn't be much longer before Aurors managed to bring down the wards and begin to arrive. Deciding that Harry could wait until a more opportune time, Amicus apparated away.

Next Chapter: Harry gets to learn a new skill; new students join Ravenclaw house; Harry shares his secrets; the Goblet of Fire.

Chapter 41: The Goblet of Fire

The Harry/Luna scene in this chapter is especially for Aealket.

25th August 1994

Moments after Amicus left, Remus apparated in to find the clearing that Lily had described completely empty. "Harry, where are you?" Remus called out in the desperate hope that Amicus hadn't taken Harry.

A howl reached his ears. "Harry." Remus dashed into the woods.

Harry lifted his head as he saw Remus approaching and gave a small whine. He'd tried to change back but had been unable to do so. Remus guessed what had happened. "I'll change you back but it's going to hurt."

Harry let out a scream as pain ripped through his chest as his body contorted and changed back into its human form. Panting he explained to Remus about what he thought he'd done. "I think I've cracked some of my ribs. It hurts to breath."

Remus ran a perfunctory scan over Harry. "I think you're right. I'm going to stupefy you to make moving you easier."

Harry smiled wanly. "Just wake me when it's over."

Remus smiled back. "Stupefy."

After carefully picking Harry up, Remus headed back on foot towards the campsite to try and find Sirius. He didn't want to apparate with Harry unless he really had to.

On entering the campsite, Remus spotted Sirius running towards him, and called out to him. "Sirius, Harry's been hurt."

Sirius closed the gap between them before motioning towards a tent. "That's our tent. Put him in there."

Remus laid Harry gently on the first bed he came to. "I stupefied him to make it easier to get him here. He thinks he's cracked some ribs. I ran a quick scan and I think it might be more serious than that. His breathing seems extremely labored."

Sirius ran his wand over Harry. "Nearly half of his ribs are cracked, and two are completely shattered. He's also punctured one of his lungs. What happened to him?"

"He was attacked by one of the Death Eaters." Remus informed him. "Lily said he gave her enough time to get Orion and the girls out."

Sirius vanished the ribs that were too badly damaged to repair before opening up his medical bag. "Are Lily and the kids okay?"

Remus nodded. "Lily's exhausted though. She apparated the three girls home before coming back for Orion."

Sirius rummaged around in the bag and pulled out two vials of potion. "He's going to have to be awake for this."

Remus woke Harry up. "Harry, we need you to swallow some potions."

Harry just wanted to escape from the pain, and quickly drank the first potion Sirius fed to him. "What is that?"

"It will repair the tear in your lung. Stay still for a few moments for me so that it can do its work." Sirius ran his wand over Harry as he monitored the potion's progress. Several minutes later he put down the wand. "Your breathing should have eased up a little now."

Harry took a deep breath, and his relief showed on his face. "It has. What's that one for?" He nodded towards the second potion that Sirius held in his hand.

"Two of your ribs were beyond repair so you're going to have to re-grow them." Sirius lifted Harry's head so that he could drink the potion.

Harry grimaced as he drank the potion. "That is disgusting."

Harry gratefully washed away the taste of the potion with some water that Sirius helped him swallow. "I recognize the taste of that. It's Skele-Gro isn't it?"

"Yep." Sirius knew how horrible the medicine tasted. "I'm afraid you're in for an uncomfortable night."

"I'll sit with him." Remus wasn't letting Harry out of his sight. "I'm not leaving him alone while there are Death Eaters on the loose."

Sirius put a hand on Remus' shoulder. "They all seem to be gone now. I think Harry will be perfectly safe here."

Remus let out a deep breath. "Lily firecalled me to tell me what was happening. She said that she wasn't able to apparate again."

Sirius too appeared to have had trouble. "I tried to apparate to the Weasleys' tent to check on Jamie but I couldn't do it. I think the Death Eaters must have put up some sort of wards. I had to go on foot."

"Is he alright?" Remus asked.

"The family in the next tent said that Arthur Weasley and his wife got them all out and away." Sirius looked across at Remus. "How did you manage to get here when Lily couldn't apparate in?"

"I guessed that some sort of wards had to have been erected when Lily said she couldn't apparate here, so I tried to apparate as far away as I could from the campground. I got through first time into center of the woods, so I presume the wards couldn't have stretched that far." Remus didn't want to explain that his Dark Mark had actually allowed him to apparate through the wards.

Not wanting Sirius to dwell on how his Dad had gotten past the wards, Harry asked Remus about Lily. "Why did it take Maman so long to come back for Orion?"

"With three people to apparate, she could only apparate a short distance away. She said she had to take the two younger girls home

first, and then she returned for Anna. She came back as quickly as she could for Orion.” Remus explained.

Harry knew he should have thought of that. “Orion was stunned. Is he okay?”

Remus nodded. “Lily said that everyone was fine, Harry; just a little frightened and upset.”

Sirius laid a hand gently on Harry’s shoulder. “Once I’ve made sure you are doing okay, I’ll apparate home and check on everyone.”

Harry felt relief flood through him. “I’d hate for anything to have happened to them.”

“And I would have hated it if anything really awful had happened to you.” Remus squeezed Harry’s hand. “Not that what’s happened isn’t really awful; for me to see you like this isn’t exactly enjoyable. To be honest, I thought the worst when Lily told me that you were fighting a Death Eater. I don’t think I’d ever felt that afraid before.”

Harry squeezed his Dad’s hand back. “Me neither; I thought Amicus was going to kill me.”

Remus went white. “You took on Amicus?”

Sirius looked curious. “Who’s Amicus?”

Harry quickly explained. “He’s the one who attacked all of us when we were returning from Hogsmeade. I think he’s one of Voldemort’s supposed Lieutenants.”

Sirius gave a shudder at Harry’s mention of the Dark Lord’s name. “You engaged someone you thought was a Lieutenant?”

Harry nodded. “Not through choice. I thought Amicus was going to hurt Orion. I’ll feel better once I get to see him.”

“If Lily said he’s okay, then I’m sure Orion’s just fine, Harry.” Sirius tried to allay Harry’s fears before looking down at him. “Your Dad

should be proud of you. There aren't many children of your age who would do what you did. I think you were very brave for defending your brother like that."

"I didn't feel it. I thought my heart was going to jump out of my chest." Harry admitted.

Remus let a rueful smile play around his lips. "I definitely know how that feels." He put a hand on Harry's head, and stroked his hair. "And I am proud of you. Sirius is right; most children would have either ran or gone to pieces if they had had to face someone like Amicus."

"How do you know who this Amicus is?" Sirius continued asking about the Death Eater as he cleaned up Harry's arm.

"He told me who he was." Harry hated having to lie.

Sirius' face revealed his curiosity as he asked Remus a similar question. "How did you know who he was? You appeared to know who Harry was talking about when he mentioned him."

"Amicus seemed to take great pleasure in informing me of who he was when he attacked me at Hogsmeade." Remus shrugged casually. "Perhaps it's his way of leaving a calling card."

Sirius looked fascinated. "He sounds like a bit of show-off. So tell me Harry, what makes you think he might be a Lieutenant?"

"His mask was different from the other Death Eaters we saw earlier this evening." Harry lied smoothly to Sirius. "After we were attacked at Hogsmeade, I looked up information about the Death Eaters. According to rumors, those closest to the Dark Lord wear different masks. His mask was definitely different; it was silver with an intertwined embossed snake and skull on it."

"When I was captured by You-Know-Who, there were a few of the Death Eaters who had different masks than the others. Moreover, there was one Death Eater who wore a mask like the one you've just described, and he was always with the Dark Lord." Sirius had never discussed his imprisonment with Harry before.

Harry frowned at Sirius' use of the Dark Lord's name, but because of the gloomy look on Sirius' face, he didn't want to push him to talk more about it. "I'm just glad that you came out of it alright."

Sirius stood up and shook himself before heading for the kitchen. "I need a drink."

Sirius walked back into the room with a couple of beers for him and Remus. "If we're talking about the same person, then this Amicus is a nasty piece of work. The next time you see him, I suggest you don't try and fight him. Try running instead."

Remus agreed. "Sirius is right. Get as far away from him as you possibly can."

Harry hoped never to see Amicus again. "I think it would be a good idea if I could learn how to apparate, just in case I run into him again."

Remus laughed out loud. "Trust you to try and take advantage of a situation like this."

Sirius, however, concurred with Harry. "He's right Remus. If he'd been able to apparate, he'd have been able to get Orion out of this mess, instead of having to wait for Lily to return to get him."

"But he's not seventeen; it's not legal." Remus pointed out.

Sirius just laughed. "Said the man whose best friends at school became illegal animagi to keep him company."

Remus held up his hands in surrender. "You've got me. You win."

Sirius winked at Harry. "Well then, tomorrow we'll teach him to apparate."

"But I'm supposed to be going to Diagon Alley with Maman to get my school things." Harry sounded disappointed as he remembered what he was supposed to be doing.

Sirius dismissed his concerns. "I think shopping for school things comes way down the list at the moment. I'll explain to Lily; she'll understand."

Harry was thrilled. "I've already read up on the theory."

"Ravenclaw enthusiasm strikes again." Sirius teased Harry, making him blush. "Now young man, I suggest you try and get some sleep."

Harry did as he was told and closed his eyes, trying to ignore the pin pricks of pain that were invading his ribs.

Sirius put down his beer glass and walked towards the exit to the tent. "I doubt very much whether this Amicus fellow or any of the others will be returning, as I think that they've probably made their point. I'll be back in a little while. I want to check on Lily and the kids. It must have been pretty traumatic for all of them. I also want to make sure that Jamie really did get back alright."

"You're going to obliviate the kids aren't you?" Remus suspected this was the main reason behind Sirius' return home.

Sirius nodded. "Probably Scarlett and Cassie I will. I'll discuss it first with Orion and Anna."

"Don't worry if Lily wants you to stay. If anything happens, I'll take Harry and head back to Grimmauld Square." Remus reassured his friend, before Sirius disappeared, leaving Remus standing alone.

Remus turned and walked back into the tent to find Harry lying awake watching him. "Is there anything you couldn't mention in front of Sirius?"

Harry nodded. "Amicus is aware that I know you're a Death Eater."

"You told him you knew, didn't you?" Remus wasn't angry at Harry.

"He pretty much guessed that you'd probably told me." Harry informed his Dad before giving him a rundown of the conversation he'd had with Amicus.

"He was playing cat and mouse with you." Remus had seen Amicus operate like that before. "If he came out on a mission with the rest of the Death Eaters, he used to toy with his victims before killing them."

"But he could have sent an Avada after me when I fled into the forest, but he didn't." Harry pointed out the flaw in Remus' theory.

Remus thought for a moment before answering. "You've got a good point. I can only assume that it's either because you're my son, or because you'd maybe thrown him off balance changing as you did. However, I suggest we don't put either theory to the test. I think I'd prefer that if there is a next time, you flee rather than fight."

Harry smiled weakly. "I think I can safely guarantee that." He had a question. "Dad, did you see Sirius when he was captured by Voldemort?"

Remus shook his head. "I wasn't there then. The school term had started again, and I was teaching in France at Beauxbatons. It was very rare the Dark Lord ever called me when I was teaching; it would have raised far too many suspicions amongst most of the teachers if I kept disappearing at night. I only returned to England the day after you were attacked. Olympe, Beauxbatons' headmistress, let me take an extended leave of absence, from which I didn't return until the following year."

Harry tried to distract himself from the pain the Skele-Gro was inflicting on him by asking more about France. "I remember you telling me before about Voldemort being based in France but I can't remember you telling me why."

Remus sat down. "There was a large battle here in England, and the Dark Lord lost a lot of men in it. He moved his entire operation to Paris for a while until he rebuilt his numbers."

Harry recalled the incident now that Remus had reminded him of it. "It took place close to Hogsmeade, didn't it?"

"It did. I was lucky to come out of that one alive." Remus had barely been able to apparate away. "I'd been a Death Eater for almost a year by then."

"When exactly did you become a Death Eater?" Harry continued questioning his Dad.

"The September after I left school." Remus remembered back to his first meeting. "I can still remember how frightened I felt when I went to receive my Dark Mark."

"Did it hurt when you got the Dark Mark?" Harry shifted slightly trying to get more comfortable.

"Not as much as transforming used to, but yes, Harry, it does hurt." Remus sighed. "I've got something to show you."

Harry watched as Remus rolled up his sleeve. "Where's it gone?"

"The Dark Lord ordered me to move it. Now that he's back, he didn't want me bearing such an obvious symbol of his service while I'm working at Hogwarts." Remus rolled his shirt sleeve back down. "It's now at the base of my spine."

"But you had it on your arm when you worked at Beauxbatons." Harry pointed out.

"I'd only been working at Beauxbatons for less than three weeks when I joined the Dark Lord. Olympe found me lying on the school grounds bleeding with a Dark Mark freshly imprinted on my arm. I swore to her that I would never deliberately harm any of her students, and that I hadn't really wanted to join. When I told her I couldn't tell her why I'd joined, she still accepted me." Remus still counted the headmistress as one of his best friends.

Harry was enthralled by what Remus was telling him. "Wasn't the Dark Lord bothered that you had such an obvious mark when you worked at Beauxbatons?" He stopped called You-Know-Who 'Voldemort' as it was making his Dad wince every time he did it.

“Not particularly; back then he must have thought me expendable. Obviously he thinks differently now.” Remus smiled. “Lucky me, eh?”

Harry didn't think so. “So you had to go through all that pain again?”

Remus shook his head. “Not exactly. The Dark Lord doesn't remove the Dark Mark; he simply moves it. Unfortunately the pain is a lot worse than getting the original Dark Mark. It almost feels as if your blood is boiling as it makes its way to wherever you've chosen.” Remus laughed wryly. “If I'd known it was going to hurt that much, I'd have asked him to move it somewhere a little closer to its original spot.”

Harry shuddered. “I'm glad I don't have to go through something like that.”

“So am I.” Remus sat back. “Is there anything else you want to ask?”

“No.” Harry couldn't think of anything.

“I've got something to ask you.” Remus put his hand on top of Harry's where he knew the Potter ring lay. “Why didn't you simply portkey out of the clearing?”

“I forgot about the ring.” Harry went red. “I can't believe I was so stupid.”

Remus tried to console Harry. “Don't beat yourself up over it. Everyone's going to be fine, including you.”

Harry sighed. “You're right. I just can't believe I forgot about it. Next time it will be the first thing I'll try, before apparating of course.” Harry shifted and winced as his ribs made themselves known again. He smiled ruefully up at his Dad. “I know I've got no wish to re-grow my ribs again.”

“I bet you don't.” Remus smiled down at his son. “I know you're feeling uncomfortable right now, but I suggest you try and do as Sirius said, and get some sleep. I'll be here all night.”

Harry felt comforted knowing that his Dad would be watching over him. "I'll see you in the morning."

"Goodnight Harry." Remus let the tent flap drop down as he walked outside the tent and sat down.

At that moment, Sirius apparated in to find himself being held at wandpoint. "It's only me, Moony."

Remus lowered his wand. "Sorry, you made me jump."

Sirius sat down next to him. "I brought us a bottle of scotch. I wanted something a little stronger than beer." He pulled the bottle and a couple of glasses out of the bag he had with him. "I left Lily and the kids sleeping. However, I don't see us getting much sleep tonight, do you? I feel far too keyed up after this evening's events."

Remus took a glass off Sirius. "I know exactly how you feel. So what do you want to talk about?"

"How about your love life?" Sirius suggested.

Remus scowled at his friend. "What love life? I usually live in a school."

Sirius smirked. "But right now you're not."

Remus sighed. "I haven't dated anyone for quite a while."

Sirius was surprised. "And why not?"

"I think I've managed to work my way through most of the women I know." Remus tried to deflect the conversation away from his abortive love life by making a joke.

Sirius laughed. "So your love life isn't going to provide me with any juicy gossip, if you haven't got one." He glanced over at his friend. "In that case, I think we should discuss how we're going to teach your son to apparate."

Remus sat back and began to tell Sirius all about his ideas.

1st September 1994

Harry grinned down at Orion who had slipped into the space next to him. "So what did you bribe the Sorting Hat with?"

Orion punched his big brother in the arm. "Nothing. It actually said I could have gone to Ravenclaw or Gryffindor but it could see that I wanted to be with you. It said that it was the second time he'd let a brother of yours follow you here."

Dudley put down the fork he was already holding in anticipation of his meal. "I didn't want to be separated from Harry, so I begged the Hat to put me here. I'd have ended up in Hufflepuff otherwise."

Luna nudged Dudley. "There's nothing wrong with Hufflepuff."

"Except for the fact that Harry wasn't there." Dudley pointed out. "I was only eleven and didn't want to be on my own."

Harry felt touched at Dudley's admission. "I'm glad that both of my brothers are in Ravenclaw." Despite the fact that Jamie was his brother, Harry had a hard time thinking of him that way.

Orion looked over to the Slytherin table where Anna was now sat in between a blond boy and Olivia Snape. "I expected Anna to make it into Ravenclaw." He didn't mention that he was glad that she hadn't.

"The Hat doesn't choose by brains alone." Luna explained. "I think it takes all of your personal qualities, as well as your wishes, into consideration. I expect the Sorting Hat looked at Anna's traits before deciding."

"I didn't want to be in the same house as my sister." Bas Snape piped up from across the table. "But mostly I didn't want to be in Slytherin because I don't want everyone to say that my Dad favors me."

Harry knew how much Bas wanted to stand on his own two feet. "I'm afraid that they're going to say that no matter what you do."

Bas' face fell. "Your Dad is a teacher. What do you do about it?"

Harry looked up to where his Dad was sitting next to Professor Moody, who had taken over the Defense position. "Exactly the same as Hermione does; I just ignore them. Eventually people will start to judge you on what you can do, and not on who your parents are."

Bas looked a little happier at that. "Thanks, Harry."

Draco looked across the room at the Slytherin table. "Speaking of siblings, I might have known that mine would make Slytherin."

George followed Draco's line of sight to the blonde boy who was sitting next to Anna. "Who's the boy on the other side of Malfoy?"

"Galton Goyle." Draco informed him. "I met him when the Goyles visited my Dad. He's not a bad kid, just a little shy."

Dudley didn't think before responding. "He still made Slytherin though."

Harry frowned at his brother. "As did Livvy Snape ." Even though Bas was older than Livvy by almost a year, their birthdays meant that they were both eligible to join Hogwarts in the same year. "Both Hermione and I thought she would get into our house."

Dudley looked around. "There are a lot of students this year; I wonder why?"

George answered his question. "Probably because things calmed down after You-Know-Who was defeated. People obviously celebrated by..."

Luna cut him off. "Thanks George, I think we get the picture. Try and remember that there are younger students here."

Orion smiled happily as he listened to the people sitting around him. He was truly delighted to have gotten into Ravenclaw. Harry had already promised to borrow him Hedwig to write home to tell his

parents as Anna would no doubt be using Clawbeak, the owl their parents had given to them. The bird had taken to Anna and didn't appear to like Orion, as it had bitten him when he'd tried to stroke it.

Over on the Gryffindor table, a similar discussion was going on about student placements. "Orion should have been in Gryffindor." Jamie shot a dirty at look at Harry. "I bet it's his fault."

"I don't believe you." Neville, who had sat with Harry on the Express on the way back to school, scowled at Jamie. "From what Harry told me, he risked his own life to saved Orion at the campsite, and you still won't cut him a break?"

Jamie shrugged. "I know Harry's my brother, but I just don't like him. I'm grateful he saved Orion but I bet that Death Eater wouldn't have hurt him anyway. Mum said Orion was only stunned."

Neville shook his head. "I think you're wrong. Harry said that the Death Eater was more interested in him. That's why he only stunned Orion. If Harry hadn't been there, Orion could probably have been hurt or worse."

Jamie looked at Neville as if he was mad. "As if a Death Eater would be interested in Harry."

Unable to keep quiet, Ron sneered at Neville. "Who asked for your opinion anyway, Longbottom? You're so far up Harry's..."

George's girlfriend, Katie, who had been made a prefect, interrupted. "Ronald Prewett, I suggest you mind your mouth. You might want to remember that there are younger students here who you're supposed to be setting an example for."

Ron blushed and fell silent, but not before throwing another scowl in Neville's direction. Seeing that Ron had actually listened to what she had to say, Katie turned away and continued her conversation with Angelina.

Sitting right next to the Gryffindor table and being fairly close to Ron and Jamie, on the Slytherin table Anna could hear every word that

was being said, and she pulled a face at Neville before returning to her conversation with Matthias Malfoy.

Up at the teacher's table, Minerva had spotted Anna's face pulling. She'd been against letting Anna join Hogwarts a year earlier than she should have, despite the fact that the girl was obviously very intelligent. She had a feeling she was going to be more trouble than she was worth, especially after meeting her initially at Lily's home. She turned to Remus. "I think we're going to have our hands full with that one."

Remus knew she was right. "Sadly I think you're correct. I disagreed with Lily and Sirius about her starting early. I know she's going to be eleven next month, but she's going to overshadow Orion who really needs encouraging. Despite their age difference, Anna's been nothing short of a bully to Orion and his little sister."

Minerva spotted the boy on the Ravenclaw table. "He seems pretty content over there with Harry."

"He probably is. When they first met, Orion and Harry hit it off straight away. I think Orion thinks the world of Harry and would do anything for him." Remus informed her.

"I'd rather he feel like that about Harry instead of Jamie Potter. He's already far too spoiled without having his brother hero-worshipping him." Minerva turned her attention back to the Gryffindor table where Jamie was sitting. "I'm going to have to crack down on that boy. Everyone's far too lenient with him."

Remus was glad to have Minerva on his side about Jamie. "That's quite the understatement."

Dumbledore standing up prevented any further conversation between the two friends. "Good evening. I thought this year I'd let everyone enjoy their meals before making any announcements. Has everyone finished?"

The children in the room looked around at each other. Crabbe and Goyle at the Slytherin table were the only two students still eating. "If

Mr. Crabbe and Mr. Goyle could take whatever else they need, I think the tables can be cleared." The whole school watched as Gregory and Vincent grabbed a few chicken legs just before the food and dirty dishes vanished.

Dumbledore smiled. "Before I share something special with everyone, I would like to announce some changes in the teaching staff. Professor Grubblyplank is joining us this year for Care of Magical Creatures. She'll be taking the fifth to the seventh year classes while Professor Hagrid looks after the second to fourth years." A huge cheer rose up from those students who had managed to escape Hagrid's clutches. His lessons had turned out to be something of a minefield from which you just hoped you could make it out of unscathed.

George grinned at Harry. "Thank goodness. I wanted to drop Creatures but Dad wouldn't let me." Over on the Slytherin table, Fred was wearing a similar look. The two boys smiled at each before returning their attention back to Dumbledore.

"Sadly." Dumbledore paused for a moment, a twinkle in his eye. "I have to announce that Professor Binns has moved on to the other side. Professor Lupin has therefore kindly agreed to fill his position." Most of the students looked disappointed; they'd enjoyed taking a nap or chatting in history. However those students about to take their OWLs and NEWTs, were overjoyed, and cheered happily.

"One final teaching change is that we welcome Professor Moody to our staff. He will, of course, be taking over Professor Lupin's former spot." There were no cheers, just polite clapping, as the children stared at the beaten face of the former Auror. Moody, however, didn't look bothered about the lack of applause.

George filled Harry and the others in on Moody. "Dad said Moody was once a crack Auror but he's now become really paranoid. In fact Dad had to help cover up an incident with Moody shooting some at trashcans just before school started."

All the children turned to stare at the former Auror who, realizing he was being looked at, stared equally hard back at them. A little unnerved they all returned their attention to Dumbledore.

Dumbledore stepped away from the table and came to stand in front of the children on the floor. "It has been decided this year that, for the first time in almost two hundred years, the Triwizard Tournament will be held here at Hogwarts."

Harry's mouth fell open. He'd heard about the Tournament from his Dad and had imagined having to do battle with dragons and other strange creatures. In his childish dreams, he'd always been the victor and had never succumbed, unlike many of those his Dad had told him about.

Dumbledore continued. "Because of the dangers the Tournament holds, it has been decided by the Ministry that no-one younger than sixteen may enter."

Harry's face fell. "I was hoping to enter it."

Dudley was dumbfounded. "Are you mad? People have died during it."

Dumbledore hadn't finished. "We were originally going to set the age limit at seventeen, but as Professor Moody pointed out to both the Ministry and myself, there appear to be a lot of capable students who may miss out if we do this. The other schools will be arriving on Sunday."

George was beaming. "I'm going to enter. I wonder which schools will make up the threesome?"

Harry shrugged. "It doesn't make any difference to me. I'm going to be too young to take part anyway."

Sitting on the teacher's table, Remus was relieved that Harry wouldn't be old enough to participate. Ever since he'd told Harry about the Tournament, he knew that Harry had been captivated by the tales of heroics from previous Tournaments.

The evening ended with the school buzzing about the Tournament. Luna slid her arm through Dudley's. "I'm glad Harry's can't enter. I have a horrible feeling that if he entered, he might end up in a lot of danger."

Harry overheard Luna's comment. "I can dream can't I?"

Luna smiled consolingly. "As long as that's all you do."

Harry sighed. "As if I can do anything else."

Once the group had reached the tower and they'd all bid goodnight to Orion and Bas, Harry pulled the others into a corner. "I need to speak to all of you this Saturday. Meet me at ten by the tapestry of Barnabas the Barmy." He then addressed George. "If you want to come, you can't tell Fred about this."

George, who now spent more time with Harry and his friends than he did with his own brother, nodded. "Don't worry, I won't say a thing. He'll probably be with Daphne anyway."

The group then disbanded, but not before Dudley cornered Harry alone. "What's going on?"

"I'll explain on Saturday, Dud." Harry only wanted to tell them once.

Trusting his brother, Dudley nodded. "Okay."

3rd September 1994

The small group stood in the middle of the pensieve still not quite able to believe what they had just seen. Harry had explained briefly about what to expect before they'd all gone in.

Harry turned to them. "Any questions?"

George burst out laughing. "You're unbelievable. You dump us in the middle of a minefield and ask a stupid question like that."

Harry grinned. "Let's get out of here."

Luna sat down on the sofa, and passed out the butterbeers they'd brought with them. "Well at least what you've shown me explains something."

"And that is?" Harry took a deep draught from the bottle.

"Why I thought you and Hermione should have been wearing Gryffindor uniforms when I first saw you, and why I thought we'd end up together." Luna winked at Dudley so that he knew where her real affections lay.

"But the timeline has totally altered; there's no way you could have known." Hermione pointed out.

Luna shrugged. "I get feelings about when things are going to happen sometimes. Perhaps it's because of the alternate timeline."

Dudley defended Luna. "She does have a point. She knew that Grim was going to ask Mum to marry him."

Harry shook his head. "But in all my experiences with the alternate timeline, Mum never met Grim. I don't even know if he exists there."

Luna was unperturbed. "Perhaps I just have a natural ability."

"I'd probably go with that more than anything else." Harry told her.

Hermione didn't agree but sensibly said nothing. Harry smiled at her before speaking again. "There's more, but it's not my story to tell."

A knock at the door interrupted the group. Harry got up and unlocked the door. "Dad, Anna, you're right on time."

Remus locked the door behind the two of them. Frances had been as good as her word and had made sure that the portrait guarding the room had been suitably distracted. He turned to the children. "I want everyone to stay sitting down while I tell you what I have to about me. I've only agreed to tell you this information because Harry assures

me that you are all trustworthy. However, I still need you all to swear an oath not to reveal what I'm about to share with you."

Neville stood up. "I'll do it, Professor." The other four children who didn't know about Remus' background, quickly followed suit.

"I think it best if everyone passes their wands to me." Harry interjected before Remus could continue speaking.

Draco reluctantly passed his wand over to Harry. "Why?"

"Just trust me." Harry took the wands and placed them on the seat next to him.

Remus then began talking again. "I've got something to show you. Please don't panic. I won't hurt anyone."

Luna leant forward. "But we all know you're a werewolf."

George went white. "I didn't."

Harry patted George on the back. "Don't worry George. It's not as if there's a full moon at the moment, not unless you want there to be, of course."

Hoping that the room wouldn't create one, George immediately shook his head. "Somehow I don't think so." He looked up apologetically at Remus. "Sorry, Professor."

Remus shook his head. "It's not a problem." He looked at Draco who too had gone pale. "Are you okay?"

Draco was feeling a little uncomfortable with the news that Remus was actually a werewolf, but he knew that if Harry trusted him then it was probably alright. "I'm fine, Professor."

"Anyway, that's just one thing I needed to tell you." Remus began taking off his shirt, making Luna and Hermione blush. Having seen him naked before, Anna didn't take any notice. "This is what I really needed to talk to you about."

All the children, except for Harry, reacted differently to the sight of the Dark Mark at the base of Remus' spine. George looked less bothered by the Dark Mark than he had been when he'd learnt that Remus was a werewolf. Luna just shrugged; after what she'd seen in the pensieve this wasn't exactly that shocking. Dudley dropped his head into his hands, unable to look at Remus.

Hermione was surprised. The last time she'd seen the Dark Mark, it had been on her Professor's arm. "Err, Professor, why's it moved?"

"I'll explain later." Remus could see that Neville had something to say.

Neville stood up and faced Remus. "Did you have anything to do with my Dad's death?"

Remus pulled his shirt back on. "No. That was Bellatrix Lestrange and her husband. Frank was a good friend of mine. He knew what I was, and why."

Neville studied Remus' face carefully before nodding and sitting back down.

Draco, however, was shaking and looking angry. "Seeing as you're a Death Eater, you must have known that my Dad wasn't a Death Eater, and you never said anything to disprove the rumors. Why?"

Remus sighed. "I can't answer that, and even if I could, I would hardly give myself away as a Death Eater simply to save another Death Eater from rumors."

Draco's face darkened. "My Dad is not a Death Eater."

Harry knew that Draco wasn't going to enjoy hearing what else he had to say. "Draco, there's something else you need to know."

Draco turned on Harry. "How could you still speak to him after finding out what he was?"

Harry sighed and immobilized his friend. "Sorry Draco but you need to hear this without interruption." Harry smiled supportively at Remus before continuing. "My Dad is not only a Death Eater, but he's also one of Voldemort's Lieutenants."

"So they really do exist." George finally reacted to the news that Remus was a Death Eater. "If that's true, then they're supposed to be worse than the regular Death Eaters. They're immoral killers, Harry."

"I'm very aware of what they are, George." Harry was beginning to wonder if he'd made a mistake in wanting to tell the others about his Dad. "Dad was only promoted to a Lieutenant to provide Voldemort with a bodyguard, and not as some sort of killer." Harry avoided being totally honest, as he knew that his friends would think differently of Remus if they ever learnt about how Voldemort had used him in the cavern.

"Why are you calling Him by that name?" Harry's use of You-Know-Who's true name had really unnerved George.

"Because I noticed the other Harry doing it. As he was obviously not afraid to use it, I decided that I would as well." Harry didn't tell George that it had taken him nearly a week to be able to get over his own fear that Voldemort would appear if he called him by his name.

"So what has Draco's Dad got to do with Professor Lupin being a Lieutenant?" Luna looked up from talking quietly to Dudley.

"I think Draco's Dad is also a Lieutenant." Harry looked regretfully at his friend.

Draco didn't want to believe it but couldn't say anything as he was still held by the petrificus spell. Harry lifted his wand. "Let me release you."

Draco scowled angrily. "I don't believe you. There's no way my Dad is a Death Eater of any kind."

Hermione stepped forward with a small container. "This vial contains a memory about my father. Papa said I can show it to everyone. As with Professor Lupin, you can't tell anyone about what you see here."

Draco looked at the vial as if it was an unexploded bomb, before nodding. "But I don't trust him." Draco motioned towards Remus.

"Stupefy me and then go into the pensieve." Remus offered.

Draco shook his head. "You can come in with us. I want to be able to see you."

Everyone held hands, even Dudley, who finally raised his head, revealing that he'd actually been crying. Remus knew that he and Dudley would probably end up having a long talk.

The memory coalesced around the group and Draco watched as a man in a silver mask gave instructions to the novices as to where to go and what to do when they got there. "Who are they?"

Hermione stopped the memory. "One is my father, and the other is a woman we don't know."

Draco was shocked. "Professor Snape's a Death Eater too?"

Hermione shook her head. "He didn't complete his mission."

"What do you mean?" Draco asked.

"To become a fully-fledged Death Eater, you have to perform a kill picked out by your sponsor." Remus explained. "Severus couldn't do it. In fact he lied about who was in the house, and managed to save their lives."

Hermione took over once more from Remus. "We think the man sponsoring them is your father."

Draco shook his head. "You can't know that."

Hermione restarted the memory. "The memory will jump in a moment to when Papa realized who his sponsor was."

Draco gasped as the memory finally reached the point when the moonlight caught the silver masked Death Eater's hair. No-one except the Malfoy family had hair that color. "Oh Merlin."

"I'm so very sorry, Draco." Remus took a step closer to the boy.

Draco had tears in his eyes as he watched Remus warily. "Okay. So he might be a Death Eater, but how do you know for sure that he's a Lieutenant?"

"His mask identifies him as one." Harry interrupted as the memory froze in place.

Draco walked around the silver-haired man. "But he doesn't have a Dark Mark on his left arm. Professor McGonagall checked."

"Lieutenants can have the Mark placed wherever they choose." Harry explained. "That's why Dad's is on his back and not on his arm."

The implications of this sank in with Draco. "So he could have the Dark Mark anywhere, and no-one would ever guess."

"If it is him, then I'm afraid so." Remus told him.

Harry looked regretfully at his friend. "I'm really sorry you had to learn about your Dad like this, Draco."

Draco slumped onto the floor. "How could he lie so unashamedly to me?"

Harry sat down beside him. "I don't know, Draco."

Draco glanced over at Remus again. "After finding out about my Dad and believing everything he said, I now don't know whether I can trust you. If my own Dad could lie to me, then why can't you?" Draco felt torn. He truly wanted to believe that Remus wasn't the monster the world perceived the Death Eaters to be but he was finding it hard,

particularly in light of finding out that Lucius had appeared to have lied to him.

“I’ll prove to you that you can trust Dad.” Harry got up. “I need everyone out. I want to place a few other memories into the pensieve, and then we can all come back in. I couldn’t show you these until Dad had explained about himself.”

A few minutes later everyone was back inside the pensieve. Harry began the first memory. “This is what happened to the alternate Remus.”

Draco and the others watched horrified as the memory progressed. Luna hid her face as Severus dealt the killing blow.

Once the memory had ended, Harry began the memory of the Hogsmeade attack. “This is what happened on the way back from Hogsmeade when Hermione and I were attacked. It’s from Anna’s point of view.”

The group watched silently as Remus pushed Anna out of the way. They all gasped when they saw how little the killing curse had missed Remus by.

Draco turned to Harry. “Can you stop the memory?”

Harry did as he was asked, and Draco walked over to the frozen Death Eater. “His mask is different from the man we think is Lucius. Is this one a Lieutenant as well?”

“He is. His name is Amicus. I think everyone should sit down while I explain.” Once everyone was seated, Harry pointed to the mask. “This signifies Amicus’ status. Dad’s is a little different and looks just like the one you saw in the earlier vision of the man we believe is Lucius Malfoy; it just has an embossed snake on it. As far as I know, there are seven Lieutenants; Amicus, two ranking below him and four below them like my Dad. I don’t know what kind of markings the two higher ranking Lieutenants have on their masks, but I’m assuming it’s some form of snake or snake and skull.”

Draco couldn't tear his eyes away from the Death Eater. "Why did this Amicus try to kill Professor Jameson?"

"The Defense position was cursed by the Dark Lord when Dumbledore refused him a position here. As you all know, teachers in that position have a habit of dying after a year. The Dark Lord wants a Death Eater here, so he decided to remove Anna and put me in her place." Remus explained.

Harry's face became grim. "When he interfered, Dad was supposed to complete Amicus' mission but he refused; the consequences of which I'll show you in a moment."

"That's why Binns is gone and you've taken his place isn't it?" George jumped in. "I bet you exorcised him instead of having to kill a real teacher."

Remus confirmed George's guess. "Five points to Ravenclaw. When I refused to kill Anna, I was told that I had to find another position to teach in, and to do whatever was necessary."

"So what did they do to you when you refused?" Draco knew it had to have been something awful from the look on Harry's face.

"I'll show you." Harry had already placed the memory in the pensieve.

When they reached the part of the memory where Remus began screaming, Luna burst into tears. "Stop it, please."

Harry immediately ended the memory, leaving them standing in a misty haze, before pulling everyone out.

White-faced, Draco staggered over to the sofa and sat down. "You're supposed to be on their side. How could they do that to you, and why did you let them?"

"I couldn't fight back." Remus could still remember how badly he'd wanted to lash out at Amicus. "I've sworn an oath not to attack Amicus. It was part of a larger oath I took when I became a Lieutenant."

"What about the other Lieutenants; can you attack them?" Draco knew that Remus would know he was talking about his Dad.

Remus wasn't quite sure how Draco would take his answer. "I can. There are only two people I can't touch unless invited to do so; Amicus and the Dark Lord."

"Good." Draco sounded almost savage. "If Lucius is a Death Eater, then he deserves everything he gets."

Harry was shocked at Draco's vehemence. "Draco, he's your Dad."

Draco shook his head. "If he was the man in Professor Snape's memory; the one who cold-bloodedly ordered the torture and execution of any Muggles that were found inside the house, and I'm fairly sure he was, then he's no father of mine." Draco could tell that his harsh words were making Remus feel uncomfortable. "I'll be honest with you, Professor Lupin. I wasn't exactly thrilled to find out that you're a Death Eater. After I watched the memory about Lucius and realized that he'd lied to me, I decided that as you were also a Death Eater, that you too couldn't be trusted. However, what you did when you risked your own life to save Professor Jameson, Harry and Hermione has proved to me that you can be. Anyone who is willing to go through what you did isn't someone whose first thought is saving their own skin."

Remus could feel his legs shaking, and he sank to the ground. He hadn't realized how bothered he'd been by Draco's antipathy. "Thank you, Draco. You have no idea how much that means to me."

Draco smiled faintly at Remus before realizing he missed something. "You said earlier that You-Know-Who wants a Death Eater here. Does that mean what I think it means?"

Remus nodded. "It does."

"You-Know-Who is really back?" Neville could hear a tremor in his voice as he spoke. "I know Harry said he was attacked by a Death Eater but I didn't think that You-Know-Who was really back. The

Prophet said that the incident at the World Cup was nothing more than a hoax.”

Harry shook his head. “It’s no hoax. He’s been back since February. I would have told you all before now but I still wasn’t entirely sure whether I was dreaming or whether he was truly back. It was only after Dad was called by him that I found out that it was no dream. Then I couldn’t tell you without telling you about Dad.”

“What was it like?” Luna asked quietly.

Harry frowned. “I could show you all the memory if you want to see it but I can assure you that it doesn’t make for pleasant viewing.”

Hermione pulled a face. “Once was enough for me. I agree with Harry. It isn’t pleasant viewing unless watching a Muggle girl die to bring back You-Know-Who is your cup of tea.”

Luna shook her head together with everyone else. “So if You-Know-Who attacked the campsite, then why didn’t the Prophet say anything about it?”

“Because the Dark Lord wasn’t there; just some of his men. The Prophet doesn’t want to incite panic by declaring he’s back. People only saw men dressed up as Death Eaters, so the Prophet simply claimed it was a practical joke.” Remus grimaced. “It was definitely no joke though. Harry nearly died that night. If Amicus’ curse had caught him somewhere other than it did, the evening might have had a very different ending.”

Dudley sat down next to Remus. “You fought off the Dark Lord’s big cheese? I knew you’d fought a Death Eater but Harry...”

Harry blushed. “I had help. Maman distracted him while I...” Harry’s voice trailed off.

“While you what, Harry?” Draco prompted.

“While I changed.” Harry sighed. “I finally managed to become an animagus.”

George sighed jealously. "Well, tell us then. What are you?"

Harry couldn't himself; he grinned. "A wolf."

"Cool." Dudley grinned back at his brother. "Are you going to show us?"

Slightly red in the face, Harry changed before reverting back to his human form. "I wasn't so cool at the Quidditch Cup. I had the chance to rip out Amicus' throat and I didn't take it."

Dudley hugged Harry. "I don't think I could have done it either."

George turned to Remus. "Did you know about the attack beforehand, and if so, why didn't you do something to stop it?"

Remus wished he could have. "I didn't know anything about it. As I wasn't part of the plan, it was on a need to know basis only. It turns out that the attack wasn't authorized by the Dark Lord. A group of Death Eaters were supposed to kidnap Jamie Potter. When they failed, they decided to cause a little trouble."

"How do you know that?" Luna asked.

"The Dark Lord called a meeting a few days after the Cup incident." Remus knew he had to warn the children. "One of the main reasons I agreed to reveal what I am is that I need to warn you all. I don't know where or when, but I do know that there's going to be some sort of attack on the school or Hogsmeade at some point. So you're all banned from Hogsmeade until further notice."

"What about the other students?" Neville asked quietly. "We can't just leave them to be slaughtered if there's an attack on Hogsmeade."

"That's exactly what we will do." Anna, who had been quiet up until this point, saved Remus from having to answer. "Remus is our only friendly contact in You-Know-Who's camp. If he says anything to anyone else here, You-Know-Who will know where it came from. Remus can't risk blowing his cover for anyone."

“Not even for your family?” Draco asked.

“Not even for his family.” Harry told him before Remus could say anything.

Dudley felt queasy and turned on his Dad. “So, you’d just let them kill me and Harry?”

Harry immediately defended Remus. “You’ve already seen him risk his life for others when he nearly took the killing curse for Professor Jameson on the way back from Hogsmeade. He then stupidly took a further chance by portkeying all three of us out of the way. I don’t want him doing it again; it was dangerous.” Harry looked apologetically at his Dad for calling him stupid. “Dudley, if Dad can’t do what he needs to do, hundreds of families might be at risk, not just us.”

“But...” Dudley was looking at Remus as if he’d never seen him before.

Harry pulled Dudley to one side and invoked a privacy bubble. “You have no idea what’s Dad gone through, Dudley. He’s endangered his own life countless times to help Muggles escape from Voldemort.”

“But he won’t save us if it comes down to blowing his cover, will he?” Dudley sounded frightened.

“No, he won’t, and I now wouldn’t expect him to.” Harry’s voice became softer. “I felt the same way as you did when I found out. I couldn’t believe that he’d put his duty to others before us, but that’s exactly what’s he got to do, if he’s going to be able to try and get information that we need.”

Dudley wasn’t convinced. “I thought he loved us. If he really did, then he’d put us first.”

“Dad doesn’t do what he does because he doesn’t love us. He does it because he does.” Harry sighed. “Dudley, Dad wants us to be able to live in a world where Voldemort doesn’t exist.”

Dudley disagreed. "He's only thinking of himself. Look how many times you've been hurt now because of him."

"It wasn't Dad's fault that Amicus attacked Anna when I was there, or that I ended up in a fight with him at the World Cup." Harry argued. "If it hadn't been for Dad being there, Hermione would have died at Hogsmeade. Amicus' attack at the World Cup left me with a punctured lung and some severely damaged ribs. It's only because Dad was a Death Eater that he was able to apparate in through the wards that Amicus had erected. If he hadn't have been, then I probably would have died."

"That might be so, but how can he live with himself?" Dudley continued pushing. "I know he must have killed someone to get into the Death Eaters. He just told us himself that that's how you get in."

"Dad hates what he is, Dudley." Harry kept his voice low and steady as he tried to influence his brother. "Up until recently he carried the Dark Mark on his arm, when he could have had it moved somewhere inconspicuous. He told me that after what he'd done, he hoped he'd get caught, and that someone would kill him for it. It wasn't until he adopted us and had the girls that he began to feel differently about living."

Dudley frowned. "Why would you want to die that badly?"

"Because you've had to do things that no man should ever have to do." Harry ran a hand through his hair. "It's not my place to tell you what Dad's done; it's up to him to tell you, if you really want to ask him. But I'll say this. If you do decide to ask him, don't judge him until you've listened to everything he has to say."

"Is that why you and Dad haven't been getting along too well?" Dudley could feel his stomach roiling.

"No, that was because of him and Mum." Harry didn't want to mention Anna. "I've been resentful about what he did to her for a long time. However, I don't blame him for what he's done as a Death Eater or what he might have to do."

Dudley wasn't sure he really wanted to know what his Dad had done. "I'll think about it. Is it okay if I talk things through with Luna?"

"I'm sure Dad wouldn't mind if it will help you to cope with what you've found out, but it can't go any further than her." Harry pulled Dudley into a hug, hiding a smile as his brother dwarfed him somewhat.

Dudley wiped his eyes on his sleeve, before smiling weakly at Harry. "Thanks. I really needed that."

Harry hugged him once more, before dropping the privacy bubble. "Did we miss anything?"

"We were just talking about whether we should warn someone." George informed him.

Harry frowned. "We can't without risking Dad's cover. We're just going to have to deal with whatever happens."

"But you've already dealt with this sort of thing. We've never had to do anything like this before." Draco didn't think his conscience would allow him to remain quiet.

Harry disagreed. "No, I haven't. I'm not the Harry you've seen in the pensieve. I couldn't torture a man like he did. You heard what I said about the Quidditch Cup; I had a chance to kill one of the deadliest Death Eaters ever, and I couldn't do it."

Draco admitted to himself that Harry had a point. "But how can we sit here and let people die?"

"We don't know that they're going to." Luna contended. "And if they do, that's when we beat ourselves up over it, and not before it happens."

Draco sighed heavily. "Fair enough." He turned to Remus. "I know you can't talk to me about my father if he is a Lieutenant but if I knew for sure that he was, could you then?"

Remus nodded. "Yes, I could."

Draco relaxed. "Good." He glanced at the pensieve. "Is there anything else we need to see?"

Harry shook his head. "I've just got one more memory to show but I'm afraid it's only for Luna's eyes alone."

Dudley frowned. "Why can't we all watch it?"

"Hermione will explain while I go into the memory with Luna." Before Dudley could say anything else, Harry took Luna's hand and plunged into the pensieve with her.

As the memory unfolded, Luna watched silently until her alternate self walked naked into the bathroom. She smiled cheekily at Harry. "I do have a nice body, don't I?"

Harry blushed. "I wouldn't know. I'm trying not to look."

Luna laughed at Harry's obvious discomfort. "Most boys would have frozen the memory to take a good look. Only you would be embarrassed." She smirked. "I bet Dudley would like to see this."

Harry looked down at Luna. "You're not going to ask me to show it to him, are you?"

Luna shook her head. "Of course not. He can wait for the real thing." She giggled. "Besides I've got a better bottom than that Luna."

Harry burst out laughing at his friend. "Only you could say something like that at a time like this."

Luna shrugged. "I'm only telling the truth. I'd offer to show you but I don't think Dudley would be very happy."

"You might be right, so I think I'll pass on that offer." Harry responded, as the memory came to an end. "The next memory is of Harry finding out about Luna's sacrifice. I could have shown it to the others but it felt too personal."

Luna slipped her hand into Harry's. "You don't have to show me, if you don't want to."

Harry squeezed her hand. "I want you to see how the other Harry felt about his Luna. I think it's important."

Luna held tightly onto Harry's hand as the memory progressed. Harry looked across to see tears trickling down Luna's face. He pulled her into his arms, and let her cry for a few moments before she pulled away. "He really loved her didn't he?"

Harry nodded. "I haven't told the others yet, but I can now feel what he felt and I also know what he was thinking." Harry wiped away a tear that had escaped. "He felt as if his heart had been ripped out when he was told about Luna."

Luna pulled out a handkerchief and noisily blew her nose. "I'm touched that you wanted to show this to me." She smiled brightly. "Can we wait a few moments before we leave? I don't want Dudley to see me this upset."

Harry smiled mischievously. "How would you like to see Hermione and Harry in bed together?"

Luna smirked. "I take it that Hermione's seen the other me?"

"She has. That's why she out there telling the others about these memories and not in here with us." Harry sobered up somewhat. "The memory is the last day the other Harry was alive before doing the spell."

Luna's face lost its gaiety, and she watched in silence as the memory showed the other Harry and Hermione together. At the end she pulled a face at Harry. "She's right about one thing; smoking is bad for you."

Harry pulled a face. "I can't ever see me smoking."

Luna smiled. "Good. Now I think we should get back to the others before Dudley comes in looking for us."

Not wanting to upset his brother, Harry hurried to beat a retreat out of the pensieve.

11th September 1994

Harry was dumbfounded. He couldn't believe his name had been drawn out of the Goblet of Fire as Hogwarts champion.

Dumbledore called out his name again. "Harry Lupin."

Harry stumbled to his feet and headed towards the Headmaster. "I didn't enter."

Dumbledore ignored Harry's protest. "Follow the other two Champions please."

Harry blindly walked into the side room and down the stairs that led to a large room he'd never been in before.

Krum looked across the room as Harry entered. "But you're too young. You can't be Hogwarts' champion."

Harry felt as if his legs wouldn't support him, and sat down on a chair. "My name came out of the Goblet."

Harry had an even bigger shock as Jamie came into the room right behind him. "What's up?"

"My name came out as well." Jamie was almost as white as Harry. "But I didn't put my name in."

"Neither did I." Harry felt a kinship with his brother for the time in months.

Remus, Minerva, Moody, Severus, the heads of all the schools, and Barty Crouch from the Ministry all came marching into the room.

Dumbledore walked up to the two boys. "How did you manage it?"

“I didn’t put my name in.” Jamie looked almost in tears.

Dumbledore’s gaze bore into Jamie. “Did you get one of the older students to put your name in it?”

Jamie shook his head. “No, Professor.”

Dumbledore then turned to Harry. “Why did you do it?”

Harry stood up. “I swear I didn’t. I thought about it, but I didn’t do it. Dad would have killed me.”

Remus studied Harry’s face for a moment. “You’re telling the truth, aren’t you?”

Harry nodded. “It was a nice idea in theory but I knew I was too young.”

Remus looked at Dumbledore. “He’s telling the truth. I think Jamie is as well.”

Olympe Maxime sat down, the chair groaning slightly under her weight. “If Professor Lupin says they is telling ze truth, zen I believe ‘im.”

Karkaroff snorted. “He’s a member of the Hogwarts staff.”

“But ‘e used to be a member of my staff.” Olympe informed him. “A trusted member.”

Karkaroff backed down at Olympe’s hard stare. “Very well. But I want to know how two names for Hogwarts managed to come out of the Goblet.”

Moody joined the conversation. “I believe someone duped the Goblet into believing there were four schools, not three. Somehow someone managed to rig it so that these two boys’ names came out.”

“You really expect me to believe that?” Karkaroff disliked Moody, having been interrogated by him at the Death Eater trials.

“So we should believe that two fourth boys managed to fool an object as magical as the Goblet of Fire?” Severus drawled sarcastically.

Karkaroff realized how foolish he sounded. “So what does it all mean?”

“It means that Hogwarts has two Champions.” Barty Crouch informed him. “As the pupils whose names are ejected from the Goblet form a binding magical contract with it, they ALL have no choice except to compete.”

“I don’t want to.” Harry was adamant. “I won’t do it.”

Remus put a hand on his shoulder. “You don’t have any choice. If you refuse, the magic will slowly kill you.”

Dumbledore looked around. “Are there any more objections?”

Nobody said anything so Dumbledore smiled with a twinkle in his eye. “In that case I suggest you students return to your respective friends. I expect everyone will want to celebrate.”

Harry walked out behind his Dad. “Can I come back to your rooms tonight?”

Remus knew that Harry wanted to talk to him about what had happened. “Of course. Let’s grab a couple of bottles of butterbeer from the kitchens on our way.”

Harry and Remus reached his rooms to find Georgie waiting for them. “Georgie, is something wrong?”

Georgie nodded. “One of the girls in my class said that Harry was a cheat and that Jamie was the real Champion, so I hit her. Professor Jameson said to see you for my punishment.”

“You hit someone?” Harry was shocked.

George looked upset. "She made me really angry. I didn't mean to but I just lost my temper when she wouldn't shut up."

"It looks like someone's inherited my temper." Remus remarked wryly. "Ten points from Gryffindor and a detention with Professor Snape."

Georgie gulped. She was afraid of the potions professor and her Dad knew it. "Can't I do it with someone else?"

"Do you want me to make it two nights' detention?" Remus didn't need Georgie misbehaving on top of the worry he now had about Harry being entered into the competition.

"No, Dad." Georgie hated it when her Dad was angry with her. "May I go now?"

"You may. And Georgie?" Remus stopped her before she left.

"Yes, Dad?" Georgie looked hopeful.

"Don't let me catch you fighting over Harry again." Remus told her sternly.

Georgie's bottom lip began to tremble at Remus' tone, making him feel like a heel for upsetting her. "Georgie, come here for a moment."

Georgie closed the door.

Remus pulled her into his arms. "I don't like having to punish you but you really can't go around hitting people. I might have expected it from Auri, but never you."

"I'm sorry." Georgie sniffled slightly.

At the sight of Georgie's tears, Remus backpedaled. "You can forgo the detention this time but the points deduction still stands."

A smile lit up Georgie's face. "Thanks Dad. I promise not to do it again."

“Off you go. It’s almost curfew.” Remus opened the door and kissed his daughter on top of her head as she left the room.

“Night Harry.” Georgie’s voice wafted up the corridor as she made her way back to Gryffindor.

Harry looked pointedly at his Dad who held up his hands. “I know. I know. I wouldn’t have been that lenient with you. Normally I wouldn’t have been as lenient with Georgie either, but I just couldn’t deal with her tears on top of this evening’s happenings.”

Harry was secretly pleased that Georgie had defended him, so he didn’t really mind that Remus had let her off so easily. “It’s okay, Dad.” He then asked Remus about what had happened. “Do you think Voldemort’s behind this?”

“I don’t really know. So far as I know I’m the only Death Eater who Voldemort trusts here and I know that I didn’t put your name in the Goblet.” Remus had no idea who could have done it. “Harry, I should tell you that Karkaroff too was a Death Eater. He managed to escape Azkaban by turning in some of his former colleagues. As the Dark Lord wants him dead, I’m quite sure, however, that he didn’t have anything to do with your name getting into the Goblet.”

“What about Professor Moody? He’s new.” Harry wasn’t sure how he felt about the new Defense teacher; something about him gave Harry the shivers.

Remus shook his head. “Moody might be a little insane, but he’s no Death Eater. He’s nearly finished me off once or twice.”

Harry didn’t really like thinking about his Dad having to fight on Voldemort’s side. “I’m glad he didn’t.” Harry turned to the one person he thought might have done it. “How about Dumbledore?”

“He seemed genuinely surprised to see your name come out.” Remus frowned. “However, he didn’t look quite as surprised when Jamie’s popped out as well.”

“So you think he put Jamie’s name in?” Harry knew from the look on his brother’s face that Jamie hadn’t done it himself.

Remus nodded. “I think so. I don’t know why though.”

Harry couldn’t think of a reason why either. “I still can’t work out who put my name in.”

Neither could Remus. “Nor me.”

Harry shrugged. “I think we should forget about it for tonight and have those butterbeers you picked up from the kitchen.”

Remus passed one over to Harry. “You look as if you have something to ask me.”

Harry took a sip of his butterbeer before asking “Is Anna seeing Dae?”

Remus nodded. “She is. They’re actually engaged to be married. He proposed on the last night we all spent together in the house.”

Harry was stunned. “So George was right.”

Remus frowned. “What do you mean?”

Harry told Remus about what George had seen. “Does this mean that Dae will have to make his split from Hermione public?”

“He will, but he won’t announce it until a week or so before he gets married.” Remus could see that Harry was concerned for Hermione. “Don’t worry about Hermione. Dae is going to speak to her tomorrow to explain about him and Anna.”

Harry couldn’t see why Remus wasn’t more worried himself. “But Hermione will be left open for someone like Nott to approach her once again.”

Remus knew what he had to tell Harry would please his son. “I said that if you still felt the same way about protecting Hermione when

Dae makes the announcement, then I would be happy for you to offer Hermione the same deal as Dae did; one that either of you are able to leave should you both wish it."

Harry felt himself relax. "I'd like to do that."

Remus grinned. "I thought you might. I've already asked Feldergam to draw up the document. Don't worry; the goblins are very discrete and not under Ministry supervision. They'll keep this quiet until we decide to go ahead with it."

In his concern for Hermione, Harry suddenly realized that he'd forgotten about someone. "What happened to Anna's Muggle fiancé?"

"She broke up with him when school ended. She would have done it sooner, but she wanted to do it face to face." Remus explained. "Unfortunately he didn't take it too well. Anna's father had to obliviate him and move him to one of his purely Muggle concerns."

Harry felt sorry for Mark. "He really got the rough end of the deal, didn't he?"

"I shouldn't feel too sorry for him. He told Anna he was only dating her because she was rich, and the fact that she was a witch actually disgusted him." Remus didn't tell Harry that Anna had blacked Mark's eye for his comments.

"In that case, he deserves everything he got." Harry hated bigotry in any form. "So when are Dae and Anna actually getting married?"

"When Anna's completed this school year. She's going to be leaving after that." Remus had spent several hours chatting with his two friends about their future plans.

Harry's face fell. "Why?"

Remus could see that Harry was quite upset at learning that Anna would eventually be leaving Hogwarts. "She doesn't want to have to live apart from Dae."

Even though he didn't like it, Harry understood. "I'm probably going to drop Muggle Studies after next year anyway." Harry yawned.

Remus stood up. "I think it's time for bed."

"Do you want me to sleep on there?" Harry pointed towards the sofa.

Remus shook his head. "I've had another bedroom added so you lot have somewhere to sleep when you ambush me."

Harry hugged Remus and headed off in the direction of the door Remus pointed to. "Night, Dad."

"Goodnight, Harry." Remus opened his book as Harry closed the bedroom door behind him.

Next Chapter: The First Task; The Yule Ball. - It may be two weeks before I post again as I have a mountain of homework to complete. If I can post sooner, then I will.

Chapter 42: The First Task

12th September 1994

Luna looked up to find a white-faced Dudley standing next to the desk she was sitting at. "Do you want to go somewhere?"

Dudley simply nodded.

Luna swiftly packed up her things and, taking Dudley by the hand, dragged him out of the library. "Did you ask Frances to clear the way for The Room?"

"She offered before the conversation began. Dad must have told her I might need it." Dudley's voice sounded shaky.

Luna was glad when they eventually reached The Room, as everyone in their group had now started calling it. When she opened the door, she found a large sofa in front of a roaring fire. Soft drinks and tissues were sitting on a side table. Dudley closed and locked the door behind him, before following Luna over to the sofa.

Luna gently took Dudley's hand in her own. "Was it really horrible?"

Dudley swallowed the panic that threatened to engulf him. "I don't know how Dad did it."

"Did what?" Luna wasn't quite sure of exactly what Dudley was talking about.

"You know that I told you that Dad had done some really terrible things as a Death Eater according to Harry." Dudley waited for Luna's confirmation before continuing. "Well, I don't know what I expected to hear about when I went to speak to him but I didn't expect to find out that he, that he..." Dudley couldn't continue.

Luna rubbed his back. "Take a deep breath. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Dudley hated feeling like this. “No, I want to tell you. I need to tell you, Lu.”

Luna waited patiently but Dudley didn't say anything else. “Just take a deep breath.”

Dudley felt grateful for Luna's gentle reassurance. “Voldie had a cavern he used for torturing people he'd caught, such as Muggles and traitors. On the night of the full moon he used it as an arena to deal with those Muggles and traitors.” Dudley had started called Voldemort ‘Voldie’ after Harry revealed what he called him, but Dudley still couldn't bring himself to use Voldemort's full name.

Luna didn't need Dudley to spell it out for her. “Poor Professor Lupin.” Luna felt sorry for Dudley's Dad. “He must have really suffered knowing that he was going to kill those people.”

“He said he wasn't disturbed so much about the Death Eaters but it was those who didn't deserve it that upset him.” Dudley picked up a glass of juice and sipped out of it before continuing. “Saying that, how could he stay with Voldie after the first time? When I asked how many times he'd done it, he told me more than once.”

Luna couldn't see Remus doing it voluntarily. “Perhaps he didn't have any choice when it came to staying. Did you ask him why he did it?”

“No.” Dudley put down the glass. “I felt sick after he told me he'd done it more than once. I told him I needed some time and took off.”

Luna called out. “Frances, are you there?”

Frances appeared in the empty frame that materialized above the fireplace. “What can I do for you, Luna?”

“Can you ask Professor Lupin to come here, please?” Luna asked the portrait. “It's very important.”

As Frances disappeared, Dudley went to get up only to find himself suddenly held under the Petrificus spell. Luna shook her head at him.

“Dudley, you can’t do this to yourself or to your Dad. It’s best to get it off your chest and out in the open.”

Dudley couldn’t even frown at Luna. If he could have done anything, he would have walked out. Now because of Luna’s stunt, he could do little else except wait for his Dad to arrive.

Remus pushed open the door which Luna had unlocked for him. He spotted Dudley’s predicament immediately and went to release him, only for Luna to stay his hand. “He needs to be held still while he listens to what you have to say.” Luna had thought it a good idea after seeing Harry use the same approach on Draco.

“What does he want to know?” Remus felt uncomfortable leaving Dudley unable to move. “He said he needed some time to think things through, and then he ran off.”

“He needs to know why you didn’t leave when you could have.” Luna watched as another chair popped into existence opposite Dudley. “Why don’t you sit down and tell us?”

Remus sank heavily into the chair, and despite trusting Frances’ proven ability to police the room, he still invoked a privacy bubble around the three of them. “I didn’t leave because I was ordered to stay by Dumbledore. I swore of an oath of allegiance to him when I was still here in school. I didn’t realize what it meant when I did it. I paid dearly for tricking the Dark Lord into letting me into the Death Eaters in the first place. Not just in what I had to do to others but in the punishment he inflicted on both me and my sponsor.”

Luna knew that Dudley would probably have other questions, and she therefore released him. “Just because I’ve lifted the spell, don’t think about going anywhere, Dudley. I know you have things you need to ask your Dad, so I’ll go and leave you two alone.”

Dudley was annoyed at Luna for what she’d done but he needed her there, so he grabbed at her wrist to prevent her from leaving. “I want you to stay.”

Remus just smiled softly at Luna. "You can stay. I'm sure Dudley would just tell you about what I'm going to tell him anyway."

Dudley nodded in confirmation of Remus' suspicion. "I would. Luna's right. Now that I know you didn't do it willingly, I do have more questions."

Remus hid his hurt that Dudley thought he could slaughter innocent Muggles without good reason. "As I said earlier, I'll answer you as honestly as I can."

"How did Voldie punish you and your sponsor?" Dudley couldn't imagine anything much worse than the silver nitrate incident that Harry had shown them.

Remus shrugged off his shirt and dropped his glamour. "Both of us were attacked by the other Death Eaters. They were allowed to damage us but not to kill us. We were then left in a room without medical assistance. Luckily my werewolf metabolism helped me but, of course, without medical intervention, my back is now permanently scarred."

Luna thought about the hapless sponsor. "What about your sponsor?"

"It took him a lot longer to heal and his back looks a lot worse than mine as he wasn't a werewolf." Remus still felt guilty at what Dae had had to go through because of him. Remus then replaced his shirt and held out his arm. "I was also branded like an animal with a 'W' to delineate what I was."

Luna felt her heart go out to the man in front of her. "I'm really sorry you had to go through that."

"At the time I thought I was doing it for a noble cause; it was only after I told Dumbledore about what was happening to Muggles, and he just shrugged as if to say that it wasn't his problem, that I realized what a fool I'd been." Remus sat back down. "There was also another reason I stayed. While I was there I was able to help some Muggles escape from the Dark Lord with the help of my sponsor. Unfortunately my

sponsor got caught and nearly met the same fate as many of those who had preceded him into the cavern.”

Luna suddenly knew who Remus’ sponsor had been. “Felidae Venant’s the other Death Eater, isn’t he?”

Remus hid his surprise. “I can’t tell you who it is.”

“You don’t have to.” Luna explained. “I know it’s him. If it hadn’t have been, you’d have denied it outright, and I just knew it was him when you told me you had help. I had one of my feelings.”

“As Luna’s never wrong about her feelings, I believe her when she says that it’s Felidae.” Dudley pinned his Dad down with a hard stare. “Did you help him escape from the cavern?”

Knowing that he wasn’t going to be able to deny Dae’s identity, Remus nodded. “I did.”

Dudley felt a little better after finding out that not all Death Eaters were so bad. “Did you kill anyone that night?”

Remus nodded. “Some of the guards, and a few of the spectators, but I wasn’t bothered as I knew they were all Death Eaters.”

Dudley thought for a moment before asking his next question. “Have you ever had to kill anyone you knew, apart from other Death Eaters?”

Remus felt his stomach drop at the question, and hesitated for a moment before answering. “I have.”

“Was it someone you liked?” Luna could see that Remus was visibly upset.

Remus nodded. “I didn’t know her that well but well enough to make it difficult for me.”

Dudley wondered why Remus didn’t just tell them who it was. “Who was she?”

"You won't like what I'm going to tell you. Even Harry doesn't know." Remus had hoped never to tell anyone about what he'd done.

Despite knowing that it was going to be something bad from Remus' face, Dudley had to know. "Just tell me."

"Do you remember hearing about your Mum's Grandmother, Nanny Violet?" Remus watched Dudley nod hesitantly. "She was the Potters' first secret keeper. The Dark Lord took her from your grandparents' home. Apparently she held up to the Dark Lord's torture for days. There was no way she was going to give up the whereabouts of your Aunt Lily and Uncle James." Remus' voice cracked slightly. "At the time I was in France teaching at Beauxbatons. Normally the Dark Lord never called me back, but he requested my presence on the night of the full moon."

"How did you deal with changing when you were teaching?" Luna knew how Remus managed in Hogwarts but she didn't know if another school would have had similar facilities.

"Olympe Maxime, the headmistress, used to lock me in a reinforced cellar. She'd then silence the room so that the students wouldn't hear." Remus smiled as he remembered her kindness. "The next day she would help me to my room herself. On this occasion I explained to her that the Dark Lord had requested my presence, and she provided me with a portkey to England. From there I apparated, using my Dark Mark, to the Dark Lord's side."

"You killed Violet, didn't you?" Luna could feel Dudley shaking next to her.

"The Dark Lord's men brought her into the cavern. He had intended to leave her to watch me change so that she would know what was going to happen but one of his guards noticed that she'd recognized me. I'd met her a few times before at Lily and James' house. The guard alerted the Dark Lord, who came in and took her personally down into the arena to stand at my side. The Dark Lord told me to tell her what was going to happen to her." Remus' voice dropped down to a whisper. "I explained to her that I was a werewolf and would change

shortly; that I would kill her. She simply stuck out her chin and told me to go ahead. Right then I knew that I couldn't do it, and was going to tell the Dark Lord to go to hell. But I was too late, I hadn't noticed the time and I began to change."

"Did she know you didn't want to do it?" Luna could see that telling them was pure torture for Remus.

"I think so." Remus looked down at his trembling hands before looking up again. "As I changed she knelt down, put a hand on my head, and told me that she forgave me for what I was about to do. It was the last thing I remember before the werewolf completely took over."

Luna's felt tears in her eyes. "She was really brave."

"She was." Remus wiped a tear away before looking earnestly at Dudley. "I hated doing that; really hated it. If Dumbledore had been in the arena with me then, I know I would have killed him for making me stay."

"You would have killed anyone though." Dudley pointed out. "It wouldn't have mattered who was there with you."

"I meant I would have killed him while in human form. I wanted nothing more than to rip him apart with my bare hands." Remus admitted. "When I think about Violet, I still do."

"Why didn't you tell Harry about this?" Dudley asked.

"He never asked the question you did, and I'm too much of a coward to simply own up to him that I killed his great-grandmother." Remus sighed. "Harry thinks I didn't leave France until the night he and his birth parents were attacked."

Dudley thought for a moment. "I'm not going to tell him. If you decide to, then that's up to you."

Luna had another question. "Do you know who all the other Death Eaters are? They must know who you are as they've seen your face in the arena."

"Only the Dark Lord and his guards know who I am. They were the only ones present when I had to kill Violet so I didn't bother assuming a glamour before removing my mask." Remus explained. "It wasn't a night for general slaughter."

Ever curious, Luna had another question. "Has Dumbledore asked you to return to the Dark Lord again?"

"I don't think Dumbledore knows he back, and I'm no longer under the oath I swore to him. Dudley might have told you that I nearly died during his first year at Hogwarts." When Luna nodded, Remus continued. "When I passed through the metal detector at the airport, something to do with the Muggle device rendered the oath, and the earring that bound me to it, ineffective." Remus slipped out the earring and passed it Luna.

"Is it just a normal earring now?" Luna passed it to Dudley whose face had now become like stone.

Remus took back the earring from Dudley. "It is. I just wear it so that Dumbledore still thinks I owe him my allegiance."

Dudley's face darkened. "The bastard. He must have known what you would have to go through if Voldie found out about you."

"I think he probably expected the Dark Lord to kill me. To be honest I'm not entirely sure how Dumbledore's mind works." Remus could see that Dudley was getting angrier by the moment.

"It's because of him that you nearly died at the airport; that you had to join Voldie; that you had to kill those people and Nanny Violet." Dudley's voice was now shaking angrily.

"Dudley, calm down." Remus could see that Dudley's temper was starting to rise. "It's in the past now."

"I want to kill him." Dudley couldn't believe how angry he was feeling at that moment. "I've gone through hell thinking you were some kind of monster when it was all because of that bastard from the start. I'm going to fucking kill him."

Seeing that things were about to spiral out of control, Luna jumped onto Dudley's lap. "Dudley, I think now is a good time to kiss me."

Dudley looked at his girlfriend incredulously. "Are you mad, Lu?"

"About you, yes." Luna gave a crooked smile.

Dudley couldn't help himself, and he laughed. "What would I do without you?"

"You'd be a sad loser. Now kiss me." Luna ordered him.

While feeling a little embarrassed about kissing Luna in front of his Dad, Dudley still did as he was told.

Deciding discretion was the order of the day, Remus turned his back on the pair. Luna's voice soon came floating over to him. "You can look now, Professor."

When Remus turned back to face them, Luna was sitting on Dudley's lap. He dropped the privacy bubble. "I'll leave you two to talk alone." He looked to Dudley before opening the door. "There's still a lot we need to talk about, but right now I think we need to let things calm down a little."

Dudley smiled ruefully at Remus. "Sorry, Dad." He picked up Luna and put her on the sofa before getting up and walking over to Remus. "I'm sorry I gave you such a hard time but it was a bit of shock. I should have listened to Harry and let you explain properly instead of just dashing out. I'm not going to apologize for what I said about Dumbledore though; he deserves to die for what he's done."

Remus was glad he hadn't told Dudley about what Dae suspected Dumbledore had done during the Muggle war; it would have probably have sent Dudley totally over the edge. "I understand about how you

reacted. It isn't easy to hear that someone you love has had to do something that is abhorrent to you." Remus hugged Dudley before letting him go. "Please don't react in front of Dumbledore; I don't want him coming after you."

"I won't. Luna will keep me under control." Dudley turned to smile at Luna who winked at the pair.

Remus knew that despite her young age, Luna sometimes seemed wise beyond her years. Deciding to end on a light note he set out to tease the young couple. "Now once I've gone I expect you two to behave. Remember Frances is still watching."

"You bet I am." Frances waved from her portrait at the two children who groaned quietly as Remus left the room.

October 31st 1994

Harry climbed out of bed and yawned. His stomach dropped as he suddenly remembered what day it was.

Dudley was lying in bed watching him. "You alright?"

Harry nodded. "I just want to get it over and done with. I don't see why we need to do an interview with the Prophet first."

"It's not like anyone wants to hear all about the false champion." Goldstein interrupted the two boys. "So I don't see why you need to have an interview with the Prophet first either."

"Piss off." Draco responded rudely. "Harry's name came out first. If anyone is a false champion, it's that idiot Potter."

"Yeah, Goldstein. I suggest you shut up talking about my brother like that." Dudley got out of bed. He didn't normally use his height and size to intimidate others but he'd just about had enough of listening to Goldstein moaning about how Harry had cheated somehow.

At Dudley's words Goldstein shut up. Harry flashed a grateful smile at Dudley and Draco before making his way into the bathrooms to begin

getting ready for school. He had classes before the interview and the first task, which would be held in the evening.

The First Task

Glad to escape from the interview, Harry walked nervously down to the quidditch pitch where all four champions had been requested to meet. He still didn't see why he'd had to attend an interview anyway. Rita Skeeter had pulled Jamie off to one side after asking a few perfunctory questions of the other Champions. It had been Barty Crouch ordering the interview to end after twenty minutes that had finally allowed Jamie to escape from the woman's clutches. Harry looked up to see that the stands were filled to capacity as the entire school and visitors had crammed into the seating to watch the first task. A separate box held Barty Crouch, the three heads of the schools, and two guests for each champion. Harry had picked his Dad and Hermione, as Dudley had wanted to sit with Luna. Harry could see Lily and Anna Black had been chosen by Jamie. He didn't recognize the other four invitees. Taking his place on the raised dais, Harry was surprised to see four brooms, three Firebolts and a Nimbus 2000, each leaning against a post displaying a school decal.

Barty Crouch stood up and made his way down to the Champions. "The original plan for the first task was for each of the champions to face a dragon and steal one of its eggs. Unfortunately, the eggs of all of the dragons we were planning to use hatched prematurely, meaning that we had to devise a replacement task."

Harry felt relieved that he hadn't had to face a dragon. Up in the stand, he could see his own relief reflected in Remus' face. Harry returned his attention to Crouch.

"You will each see before you a broom. As all four of you are among the best seekers in your schools, we decided to revise the first task to take advantage of those skills. Because Mr. Krum is an international seeker, he will be handicapped by use of a Nimbus 2000." Boos went up from the visiting Durmstrang students.

Karkaroff rose to his feet. "I protest. The Nimbus 2000 will be too much of a handicap. I demand a different broom be allocated."

Krum spoke up. "I am very happy to use the Nimbus 2000, Professor."

Karkaroff hesitated before sitting back down. "Very well."

Crouch looked relieved that Krum had intervened. "Your task is to search for one of four snitches. Each one will be a different color and have a different point value. White is the least valuable, then bronze, then silver and finally the golden snitch is the most valuable. Points will be deducted if there is any foul play spotted. Whichever snitch you catch will determine the order you will begin the next task."

Harry wasn't particularly impressed. Seeking a snitch without the thrill of other players wouldn't make it very exciting. However, Crouch hadn't finished. "Bludgers have magically been set up to attack you at random intervals making your search a little harder. Also, weather pockets will suddenly appear so that you may find yourselves flying in differing weather conditions."

"Champions, mount your brooms." Crouch held a large red handkerchief and a white handkerchief. "When I release the white handkerchief, the snitches will be let go. You are all allowed to leave the ground on the release of the red handkerchief. Any foul will not only lead to a deduction in points, but will mean that the culprit will be called back down to the dais to sit out for five minutes."

All four champions looked at each other. Jamie's frustrated look convinced Harry that his twin had intended to use foul play to enhance his chances. Neither Krum nor Fleur looked bothered by the announcement.

Harry then watched as the white handkerchief fluttered to the ground, and four snitches were released. The snitches whizzed across to where the four Champions were sitting astride their brooms before disappearing in four different directions. The red handkerchief then dropped to the ground. Harry had barely left the ground when a bludger came from nowhere and nearly smashed into him. Dropping

under his broom, Harry managed to avoid it. By the time he had righted himself, his three opponents had flown off in different directions. Harry decided to keep away from Krum. If he spotted the golden snitch he didn't want the Durmstrang boy anywhere near him as, despite his opponent's handicap, he had a feeling that Krum was more than capable of outmaneuvering him.

The sky had long ago grown dark, and the pursuit had been going on for two hours; Harry was starting to feel exhausted. He had a feeling that he had a large bruise on his right shoulder where he had run into a bludger in the middle of a thunderstorm. He'd only seen it at the last minute when lightning had lit up the sky allowing him to see the dark shape heading towards him. If he hadn't have rolled to the side, Harry knew that he probably would have been re-growing his ribs again. Tired, wet and aching, Harry searched the darkened sky for the golden snitch. So far he'd spotted the white, bronze and silver snitches and, like his three opponents, had ignored them in order to look for the elusive golden snitch.

Still searching, Harry spotted a bludger heading towards him and quickly shot up into the air to avoid it; in doing so he spotted the golden snitch right behind Jamie's head. He knew that if his twin turned around, it would all be over. Bending low over his broom he shot down towards his twin as yells went up from the crowd. Krum too had seen the snitch and, despite his handicap, was managing to close the distance a lot faster than Harry would have thought possible on a Nimbus 2000. With Krum just a hair's breadth behind him, Harry reached for the golden snitch at the same moment that Jamie turned around. Harry curled his fingers around the small cold object just as Jamie's hand landed on top of his own. The next thing he knew, he felt a tugging sensation behind his navel and Hogwarts disappeared.

Harry rolled off his broom and automatically unholstered his wand. As he looked round, he immediately recognized the graveyard from the other Harry's memories. A small fire was burning in the center of the graveyard, throwing the gravestones into stark relief against the night sky. Hurriedly he turned to Jamie, who had also tumbled to the ground on landing. "Get back on that broom now and go."

Unnerved by Harry's sharp tone, Jamie reached for the broom only for it to shoot across the graveyard and out of his reach. Out of the corner of his eye, Jamie saw Harry's broom do the same thing. Both brooms disappeared into a small ring of trees on the far side of the graveyard. Now more than a little scared, Jamie pulled out his wand and stood close to Harry. Harry grabbed hold of Jamie's arm and tried to apparate. "Damn." Nothing happened. Obviously the graveyard had been warded against apparition. "We've got to get out of here."

The sound of a twig snapping made both boys spin round to face a small copse behind them. Jamie felt his legs begin to shake as a man he didn't immediately recognize and several Death Eaters stepped out from the shadow of the trees. "I'm afraid neither of you are going anywhere."

Harry felt pain rip through his shoulder, making him gasp. The closer Voldemort got to him, the worse the pain got. It was all he could do not to collapse to his knees. Trying to ignore the pain, Harry backed up as Voldemort began to close the distance between them.

Voldemort stopped walking. "I was only expecting one boy, and I've ended up getting two. Now what to do with the spare?"

The boys were saved from responding when a crack sounded and a Death Eater Harry had hoped never to see again, appeared at Voldemort's side. Amicus immediately dropped to one knee. "My apologies for the delay in arriving, my Lord."

Voldemort smiled indulgently. "That's quite alright Amicus. I'm afraid I have a bit of a dilemma. I only need one boy and somehow we've managed to end up with two."

Amicus whispered something into Voldemort's ear, making him laugh. "Amicus here has come up with a solution."

Amicus started to walk across to where Harry and Jamie were standing. Seeing him reminded Harry of his family ring. Hoping that the graveyard hadn't been warded against portkeys as they had

come in that way, Harry tightened his grip on Jamie who flinched. "You're hurting me."

Harry ignored his brother, and whispered "Tiger Lily". Harry heard a scream of frustration as the two boys once more felt a familiar tug behind their navels and suddenly found themselves standing outside a gated property. Harry cast Lumos so that the two of them would be able to see properly.

Jamie turned to Harry. "How did you do that?"

"Potter family ring." Harry knew that Jamie couldn't see the ring so he slid it off his finger, and passed it to his brother to look at.

Jamie took the ring momentarily before quickly passing it back to Harry. He didn't need reminding of what he still felt should have been rightfully his. "So what do we do now?"

"I want to do something before we leave." Harry walked over to the gates and placed his hand on the lodestone inset there. "I am Harry Remus Lupin-Potter." Harry watched as the lodestone glowed orange, and he felt the ring tingle on his finger. Not wanting Jamie to hear, he whispered the next part. "New password: Heart's Messenger."

Jamie wondered what his brother was doing but didn't bother stepping closer. He had no idea as to what type of wards might be surrounding the gates, making him even more acutely aware that he was no longer to be master of the large estate sitting behind the locked gates.

Harry walked over to his brother. "I need you to swear to keep what I'm about to do quiet."

"And if I don't?" Still feeling a little resentful, Jamie wanted to defy Harry.

"Then I'll take back the invisibility cloak that should have come to me." Harry got a little kick out of seeing the surprised look cross Jamie's face.

Jamie didn't bother to deny it. "How did you know about that?"

"It doesn't matter how I know. For the moment you can consider it on loan to you. In return I want your silence as to what I'm about to do, and your agreement to my story." Harry knew that the lure of the cloak would be too much for Jamie to ignore.

Jamie didn't want to lose the cloak. His Dad had promised to return it at Christmas. He knew that if Sirius found out that it should have gone to Harry, he would more than likely hand it over to his brother. "If I agree, then I want to keep the cloak at least until I leave school."

"That's fine with me. Now swear an oath to keep my secret." Harry didn't trust Jamie, even with the cloak as enticement.

Jamie swore the requisite oath. Satisfied, Harry nodded. "Good. If anyone asks, we'll tell them about Voldemort and say that I had a portkey on me that took us to Hogsmeade which allowed us to escape."

"You-Know-Who; Portkey; Hogsmeade. I get it." Jamie sounded a little impatient. "Now can we get on with it? I'm beginning to get a little cold."

Harry took Jamie by the arm and concentrated on the woods that ran close to Darcy House.

Jamie was a little shocked when he realized that Harry could apparate. "You're not old enough to apparate."

"Just be glad that I can." Harry didn't bother explaining himself to Jamie. "Come on, we need to get up to the school."

Hogwarts

Hermione stood up as she watched Harry and Jamie both reach out to grab the snitch, only for them to disappear. She looked at Remus. "Is that supposed to happen?"

"I don't know. I'm not privy to the rules." Remus got up. "I'm going to find out."

"I'm coming with you." Hermione followed Remus. In the stand to their left, she could see Dudley and the others making their way up to them.

Dudley was looking worried. "Where's Harry?"

"I think it's just part of the task." Remus put a hand on Dudley's shoulder. "Return to the stand with the others. If there's a problem, I'll let you know."

Anna appeared at Dudley's side. "I'll come and sit with you." She was more than aware that something was wrong, but she also recognized that Remus didn't want Dudley involved at that moment. "Come along." Dudley couldn't do anything except follow the Professor back down to his seat, as Remus and Hermione headed for where the three head teachers of the schools were gathered at the back of the guest stand. "Headmaster, what's going on?"

Dumbledore looked grave. "I don't know. That wasn't supposed to happen."

Hermione felt her stomach drop. "But how could anyone have gotten into the equipment? Someone obviously had to have tampered with the snitch for them to disappear like that."

"The equipment was all locked up." Madam Hooch stood with her hands on her hips looking worried. "As no-one was supposed to have known about the task until just before, I don't see how the snitch was changed into a portkey. I swear I had nothing to do with tampering with the snitch."

Remus placed a hand on her shoulder. "We know you wouldn't have done it. The question is, exactly who knew that the first task was going to be quidditch orientated?"

Barty thought for a moment before going through a list of everyone who had been aware of the first task. "Myself, my assistant, the

heads of all three schools, the Minister of Magic, Madam Hooch, Madam Pomfrey, Professor McGonagall and the team from St. Mungo's, Alice Longbottom and Sirius Black."

Minerva frowned. "There isn't anyone there who I wouldn't trust." Minerva actually wouldn't trust the Minister and Dumbledore, but she couldn't see either man risking such a public disappearance of the Boy Who Lived.

Hermione wasn't satisfied. "That might be the case, but someone must have known as someone turned the snitch into a portkey. Isn't there any way of tracking it?"

"There is but I suspect we've left it too long to do so." Professor Moody's eye bore into everyone as he stomped up to the group. "I think someone should let the team from St. Mungo's know what's happened, just in case we manage to track them down and they're injured. Alice should return to St. Mungo's and Black can stay here."

Lily had sent Anna to sit with her friends. Right now she was desperately worried about her sons. "I'll go down to the gates and wait; just in case the boys manage to make their way back." She then set off for the gates.

Hermione could feel herself shaking. "Do you think they've been hurt?"

"I don't know, Miss. Snape, as I don't know where they've gone." Albus turned to the others. "I think it best if we send everyone back inside."

Barty Crouch shook his head. "The other champions must still complete the task."

Albus sighed. "Very well. We'll have to let everyone think that this was arranged."

After returning to the front of the guest stand, Crouch made an announcement. "There is nothing to be alarmed about; we just needed to discuss the point allotments after what has happened. The

two Hogwarts champions will return momentarily. It has been decided that, as both boys caught the golden snitch at the same time, the silver snitch is now out of play. It is up to Mr. Krum and Miss Delacour to find one of the two remaining snitches.”

The school immediately settled back down, satisfied that the disappearance was part of the task. Dudley wasn't sure if he believed Crouch but Luna whispered to him that Remus didn't look concerned, so Harry was probably okay. Anna had a feeling that Crouch was lying but smiled convincingly at Dudley, who finally settled down.

Down on the players' dais, Krum was annoyed at losing the golden snitch but quickly set off to find the bronze one. However, it was all over within a matter of minutes as the desired snitch suddenly appeared in front of Fleur, leaving the international player with the white snitch. Karkaroff got up and stormed over to Crouch. “I told you that you unfairly handicapped my player.”

“Mr. Krum agreed to it.” Crouch reminded the irate headmaster. “The task is over. I need to make an announcement.” Turning his back on Karkaroff, Crouch cast ‘sonorous’ and turned to the school. “In the second task, Mr. Lupin will go first as he has been awarded one hundred points for catching the golden snitch.”

A disgusted yell went up from Ron in the Gryffindor stand. “That's not fair. Jamie caught it at the same time.”

Crouch heard the yell as the Gryffindor stand was right next to the reserved area he was standing in. “Mr. Potter will go second as he lost five points for fouling Miss Delacour. Miss Delacour will go third with fifty points, and finally Mr. Krum with twenty-five points. The date of the second task is February 14th. More details as to the task will be announced on the day.”

Albus stood up. “Thank you Barty. Everyone will now make their way inside. A special dinner has been arranged for everyone in the Great Hall.”

The school started to empty out of the stands until finally only Dumbledore, Crouch, Remus, Severus, who had made his way over

to the group, and Hermione remained. Remus was concerned. "I'm going to look for Harry."

"Where do you intend to look?" Severus asked quietly. "You have no idea where he might be."

"I don't know." Remus sounded frustrated. "But I know I just can't sit here and wait for something to happen."

Hermione had been about to say something when a yell interrupted her. She span round.

A light could be seen in the distance heading towards the quidditch pitch. Harry called out. "Dad, I'm here."

Remus leapt over the barrier, and quickly closed the distance between himself and Harry. Ignoring the others who were trying to catch him up, he pulled Harry into his arms. "Where have you been? I was worried sick."

"I'll explain in a minute." Harry shivered; now that the adrenalin rush had gone, his quidditch clothing felt very thin in the chilly autumn night air.

Remus pulled off his cloak and wrapped it around Harry. "Harry, where's Jamie?"

By now everyone else had reached them. "He's coming up the path with Maman. We came across her as we made our way back from Hogsmeade."

Albus took charge. "So, Mr. Lupin, would you like to fill us in on what happened?"

Harry nodded. "The snitch was a portkey. It took us to a graveyard. You-Know-Who was there."

Barty Crouch snorted. "Impossible. Your brother got rid of him."

Harry shrugged. "I'm just telling you what I saw. Anyway, we tried to remount our brooms but they disappeared out of our reach. That's when You-Know-Who and some of his men appeared."

"How did you manage to escape if, as you say, he's back?" Albus couldn't believe that Voldemort had returned, despite what Harry was claiming.

Harry lied. "I had a portkey on me. Dad insisted that I carry one on me after the incident at the World Cup. I grabbed hold of Jamie and activated it. Luckily the graveyard hadn't been warded against portkey travel."

At that moment Jamie came into sight. Albus turned to him. "So, Mr. Potter, how are we after our little trip?"

"Fine, Sir. It was just lucky that Harry had a portkey on him." Jamie kept close to his mother.

"Harry said that You-Know-Who was back. Did you see him?" Barty Crouch asked.

"I saw someone I'd never seen before. A Death Eater called him "My Lord". I'm guessing that Harry is right and it was You-Know-Who." Jamie had thought that the man looked a little like a younger version of Tom Riddle had but he wouldn't have sworn definitively that the man was, indeed, Voldemort.

Barty looked relieved at Jamie's explanation. "It was probably just someone playing the part." He turned to Harry. "What made you think it was You-Know-Who?"

"The same as Jamie." Harry wasn't going to tell them how he really knew.

Albus let out a breath. It appeared that someone had tricked the two boys into believing that Voldemort had returned. "I think it best if no-one mentions this to anyone else. We don't want to start a panic, especially after the World Cup incident."

Harry looked ingenuously at the headmaster. "What would you like us to say then?"

"Just tell everyone that it was part of the task." Albus started to head back towards the school. "I think we should all get inside now. Dinner is being served, and I'm sure you two boys are hungry."

Harry and Jamie both nodded. "I am, Sir." Harry simply agreed with the Headmaster. He would fill everyone in on what had happened later.

Later that evening

Harry decided to spend the evening with Remus, who pushed open the door to his rooms and ushered Harry in. "So what really happened?"

Harry waved up at Frances who was watching him, before turning to Remus. "Exactly what I told everyone earlier, except that I used the Potter family ring to portkey me and Jamie to the Potter Estate before apparating us both to Hogsmeade."

"So Jamie knows you can apparate?" Remus was a little concerned.

"I made him swear an oath not to tell anyone and to keep to the story I concocted. I threatened to take the invisibility cloak away from him, if he didn't." Harry grinned at his Dad.

Remus passed Harry a glass of juice before sitting down. "That was very smart. At least he can't tell anyone about your abilities."

Harry took a sip of the juice before continuing the conversation. "Voldemort wanted one of us for something. Before I used the ring he said that he had only wanted one boy."

"I think it more likely that he was after Jamie." Remus speculated. "The snitch was right behind him; if he had been facing the right way he would have ended up there alone."

"I know. I think someone charmed the snitch to appear by him." Harry frowned. "What I don't understand though is why they waited two hours to do it."

Remus had a theory. "The snitch appeared a few moments before eight o'clock. James and Lily were attacked by You-Know-Who at around eight o'clock. The Dark Lord is a great fan of symmetry; I think that is why it was timed that way."

Harry agreed. "You're probably right, but it's still a little creepy though, isn't it?"

"Just a little." Remus took a mouthful of his scotch as Harry grimaced. "I know I said I'd cut back on drinking but right now after seeing you disappear like that, I need this."

Harry waved off Remus' defensiveness. "I'm not bothered about that. I'm thinking about what happened in the graveyard." Harry got up and marched over to the window to stare out into the dark night. "My shoulder hurt worse than anything else I'd ever experienced before. It was all I could do not to drop to the ground and start screaming. Jamie didn't even flinch. Being close to Voldemort didn't seem to bother him in the slightest."

Remus wasn't surprised at Harry's words. "After seeing the other Harry react in the same way as you did to the Dark Lord, I'm now totally convinced that you're the Boy Who Lived, and not Jamie."

Harry's shoulders slumped. "I thought you'd say that, and I've got to admit, I think you're right."

Remus knew that Harry didn't want to be the Boy Who Lived. "It's not anything I didn't suspect before."

"I know, but today really brought it home to me." Harry sounded totally dejected. "I don't want it to be true. Jamie enjoys the fame it brings, I wouldn't."

"No-one else needs to know. In fact it's better that no-one else knows." Remus got up and put an arm around Harry.

"There's one more thing about today." Harry had almost forgotten about Amicus. "Amicus apparated in. He was late arriving but Voldemort forgave him. Voldemort basically declared one of us a spare; I'd say me. Amicus whispered something to Voldemort who told us that Amicus had an idea. Amicus then started to walk towards us. I think he was after me."

Remus was worried. "It looks as though you've piqued his interest."

"I'm not really sure I've piqued his interest. I think it's more likely that I annoyed him, and he was looking to finish the job he'd started at the World Cup." Harry had been more than grateful when his ring had worked; seeing Amicus strolling casually towards him had frightened him more than he cared to admit.

"Either way, it looks as though Amicus, rather than the Dark Lord is of a bigger worry to us at the moment as far as you're concerned." Remus felt queasy when he thought of what the Death Eater might want with his son.

Harry could see that Remus was uneasy about Amicus. "What about the Dark Lord? Do you think he's any kind of threat to me?"

"I doubt it; he obviously wants Jamie for something. He tried to take him at the World Cup and again today. As you said, you were an extra." Remus pondered for a moment. "I wonder if the ritual wasn't as successful as Amicus had hoped."

"Do you think he means to kill Jamie?" Harry didn't like Jamie but he didn't want to see his brother die.

"I don't know; possibly." Remus had no idea what the ritual that had brought Voldemort back had entailed. "Without more details of the exact ritual that Amicus used, I can't say for sure what he wants Jamie for. The Dark Lord thinks that Jamie is the Boy Who Lived. I'd hate for him to find out that it is more than likely you."

Harry yawned. "I've had enough of worrying about it for tonight. I think I'm going to head off to bed." Harry headed towards his bedroom door. "Night, Dad."

Remus knew that Harry was avoiding dealing with what the night had revealed but let it go. "Night, Harry."

Harry closed the door behind him and headed for the bed to lie down. He really didn't want to think about the possibility of his being the Boy Who Lived; it was a bit too much to deal with.

I cut this chapter short as I wanted to get it posted. The Yule Ball and Christmas is covered in the next chapter; possibly the second task.

Hopefully the next chapter will be up by next Thursday, if not sooner.

Chapter 43: A Surprise for Harry

31st October 1994

Amicus said nothing as Harry and Jamie disappeared, and Voldemort let out a scream of rage. Amicus was a little disappointed as he had been looking forward to dueling with Harry, even though he knew the boy was no match for him. He decided there and then, that he would make it so at some point in the future.

Voldemort swung round on the other Death Eaters who had accompanied him. "Which one of you forgot to prevent anyone from portkeying out?"

A small Death Eater stepped forward. "I did, my Lord."

His companions breathed a sigh of relief as Vickers took the blame. None of them had thought about it, but the other three weren't going to admit to that.

Voldemort nodded at Vickers. "You may go." The three remaining Death Eaters were now worried. Voldemort turned to face them. "You are a bunch of cowards. It was the responsibility of all of you to make sure that nothing untoward happened. Only one of you had the guts to admit to the fact that he'd failed which is why I let him go unpunished." He turned to Amicus. "Take them back to the house and show them what happens when you fail me."

Amicus bowed low. "Yes, my Lord." He then immobilized the three men, who didn't bother to put up a fight, before attaching portkeys to each of them. Once they'd disappeared, Amicus turned to Voldemort. "I'm afraid I need to return to my duties, my Lord. I will, of course, come back to deal with them later."

"You may go, Amicus." Voldemort sounded distracted.

Amicus prepared to apparate, only to halt when Voldemort held up his hand. "If you get the chance, drop in on Fama and tell her to report to me. I may have granted her elite status after she led me to

the Potters, but this is too big a mistake to let slide. Only Potter should have been here tonight.”

“Is she to be replaced, my Lord?” Amicus wondered if one of the wizarding world’s most disreputable and disliked figures was about to disappear for good.

“I’m not going to kill her. She can simply rejoin the ranks of the common Death Eaters; after I punish her of course.” Voldemort thought for a moment. “Do you have any suggestions who might replace her?”

Amicus nodded. “Another woman, actually. With our beloved Bella still in Azkaban, we’re a little light on the female side. I think Astus’ wife would make a good addition to the Order.”

Voldemort smiled. “An excellent choice. I’ll tell her myself. You’d better go.”

“My Lord.” Amicus bowed once more before apparating away.

Voldemort shook his head at the stupidity of his common servants before also leaving the graveyard.

5th November 1994

Hermione made her way into the library where Harry was working on his runes homework. “Harry, you missed lunch.”

Harry cast tempus. “Drat. I was so busy trying to get this finished that I didn’t notice the time.”

“I thought you were supposed to have finished that last night.” Hermione had finished her own homework the previous day.

“I ended up playing chess with Draco instead.” Harry put down his pen. “I’ve probably got another hour or two of homework left to work on.”

Hermione looked a little downcast. "I was hoping we could practice our dueling in the Room."

"Sorry, but I really want to get this done so that I can relax tomorrow. Perhaps we could meet up then?" Harry looked hopeful.

Hermione shook her head. "I can't. I've already made plans to help Daphne and Tracy with their homework in the morning. I'm spending the afternoon with Papa to go over the latest batch of Wolfsbane he's been brewing."

Harry was disappointed. "Never mind." He looked more carefully at Hermione's face; it looked as though she was going to burst. "So tell me, what's the news? I can see from your face that something has happened."

Hermione had been about to answer him when Auri burst through the doors. "Harry! Great, you're here."

"Hi Auri." Harry wondered why his sister was so pleased to see him. "What is it?"

"Professor Dumbledore announced that there's going to be a Yule Ball next month, and Draco has offered to take me. Astoria doesn't have a partner though, and if you're a third year or below you can't go unless you have a partner who is a fourth year or above." Auri smiled winningly at her brother. "As you don't have a girlfriend, I wondered if you'd ask Astoria."

Harry now knew what Hermione had been about to tell him. He opened his mouth to refuse when Hermione leant over and whispered in his ear. "Say yes; I'll explain later."

Harry stared in surprise at Hermione who looked pleadingly at him. Harry turned to Auri who was practically shredding a piece of his homework in her anxiety to hear his answer. "Tell Astoria I'll take her to the ball."

Auri let out a scream of joy before running from the library. Madam Pince walked over. "What's going on here, Lupin?"

"I told my sister I'd take her friend to the ball." Harry told the librarian who shook her head before walking off, muttering about children and their hormones.

Harry then turned to Hermione. "Why did you tell me to take Astoria?"

"Because Astoria was crying at the lunch table after the Ball was announced. Anna Black was taunting her with the fact that Draco asked Auri to go, and no-one cared enough to ask Astoria." Hermione began, only for Harry to interrupt.

"Draco really asked Auri?" Harry was surprised that his friend would do so.

"Well, Auri disappeared over to the Ravenclaw table. A few minutes later she came back and announced that Draco had asked her." Hermione hadn't thought to question whether Auri had badgered Draco into going.

"Which means that she nagged Draco into asking her." Harry sometimes felt a little embarrassed by his sister's brazen attitude.

"It doesn't really matter what happened. Because Draco had asked Auri, Anna couldn't resist having a go at Astoria for not having anyone to take her." Hermione really disliked the girl. "It didn't help that she was being egged on by Ginevra Prewett."

"Prewett encouraged Anna?" Harry frowned. "I was worried when I found out that Anna was hanging around with Malfoy and Goyle, but I think I'd prefer them to Prewett. Don't tell me, Zabini's taking Prewett?"

"Who else; she is his fiancée after all." And she'd let no-one forget the fact, flashing her engagement ring around Slytherin.

"So what else happened?" Harry knew that there must be more.

“Auri turned on Anna and Prewett and said that you were actually taking Astoria, which shut them up.” Hermione explained. “You’re not going to like this. Anna’s going with Theo Nott.”

Harry was puzzled. “Why would Nott even agree to take a first year?”

Hermione filled Harry in. “Because he owes Zabini a favor; I don’t know what though. I overheard Anna and Prewett discussing it just before I left the Great Hall.”

Harry shook his head. “Great. I’ve got one sister who throws herself at boys, and the other who doesn’t appear to have any principles at all.”

Hermione looked apologetic. “Sorry Harry. Look on the bright side. At least Auri is decent human being. She didn’t think about anything else except for defending her friend.”

Harry glowered. “I don’t mind my sister defending others, but does she have to bring me into it?”

Hermione smiled sympathetically. “If it’s any help, I don’t think Auri stopped to think of the effect it would have on you.”

“Who will you go with?” Harry knew he would have asked her if he hadn’t been taking Astoria.

Hermione teased Harry. “I’ll probably go on my own unless I’m swept off my feet by some sexy seventh year.”

Harry grinned. “I bet you won’t be. Everyone’s scared of Severus.”

“George wasn’t.” Hermione pointed out.

“George is in a league of his own.” Harry knew that George wasn’t intimidated by much.

“You’re right about that.” Hermione stood up. “Well, I’ll leave you to finish your homework. I may as well go and get ahead putting together my notes for the Wolfsbane potion.”

Harry could tell that Hermione was already starting to think about the potion. "Thanks for filling me in."

"You're welcome." Hermione headed out of the door, leaving Harry alone.

The Yule Ball

Harry checked his reflection before heading back into the dormitory.

Seeing Harry come in, Draco picked up the white carnation he'd obtained for Auri. Harry decided to tease his friend. "I thought you said that you weren't interested in my sister."

"I'm not." Draco's face told a different story. "She has a way of wearing you down."

"You keep telling yourself that." Dudley laughed as he caught Draco's denial.

"Oh shut up." Draco got up off the bed. "Let's go or we'll be late."

Dudley and Harry shared a look before bursting into laughter and following Draco out of the room.

Harry made his way downstairs, and kissed Luna on the cheek. "You look lovely, Luna."

Luna, dressed in primrose, beamed at Harry. "Thanks Harry."

Dudley nudged his brother aside. "Hands off my girl, Lupin."

Harry grinned at his brother. "As if Luna needs you to defend her."

Luna smiled up at Dudley, who easily towered above her. "I don't but I like it."

Harry and Draco made their way out of Ravenclaw tower and down to the bottom of the stairs where they said they'd meet Astoria and Auri.

They weren't alone, as quite a few students were milling around, also obviously waiting for their dates.

"Draco." Auri squealed when she spotted Draco and broke into a sprint.

"Auri, calm down." Harry grabbed his sister before she had a chance to hurl herself on Draco. "Draco's not going anywhere."

Auri went red. "Sorry, I got a little excited."

Draco shook his head. "It doesn't matter." He then passed her the carnation. "This is for you."

Harry buried his sigh, and dutifully produced a yellow rosebud which he passed to Astoria, who by now had caught up with her friend. "And this is for you, Astoria. You look very pretty tonight."

Astoria blushed and giggled at Harry's comment. "Thank you."

Harry could already tell that the evening was going to be a long one. "Shall we go in?"

Auri had been about to grab Draco to follow Harry when she saw Hermione. "There's Hermione."

The others swiveled to look where Auri had indicated. It was then that Auri spotted Hermione's date. "Crikey, that's Viktor Krum she's with."

Harry couldn't help the scowl that marred his face as he watched Hermione laugh at something Viktor said to her. They both came forward. "Hello, Harry." Viktor held out his hand to the boy who'd bested him at quidditch.

"Viktor." Harry shook hands with him before nodding stiffly at Hermione. "Hi Hermione."

Hermione immediately knew what was bothering Harry. "Viktor wasn't going to attend the ball."

Harry was surprised. "I would have thought you would have lots of girls after you."

"I did. Vich is vy I decided to ask the one girl who ignored me." Viktor grinned at Hermione, who smiled back at him.

"What Viktor isn't telling you is that his girlfriend back home wasn't very happy about the attention he's receiving." Hermione winked at Harry. "He knew that I was already engaged and therefore safe."

Harry relaxed. "Thank you for escorting Hermione, Viktor. I would have done it myself except for the fact that I'm already taking a pretty young lady."

Astoria giggled madly. Hermione hid her smirk. She knew that Harry would be glad when curfew came, and he could escort the girl back to the dungeons. She just hoped that Auri knew what a sacrifice her brother was making in taking her friend to the ball.

Dudley and Luna soon joined them and the group made their way inside. Harry halted at the door with Astoria. "I almost forgot. I'm going to have to wait here. The Champions have to perform the first dance."

Hermione stopped too. "As I'm with Viktor, I need to stay here as well. Luna can you save us some seats?"

Luna nodded before heading into the room. "Of course."

Seeing Harry's worried look, Hermione squeezed his hand, making Astoria frown. "You'll do fine, Harry."

Harry grimaced. "I hope so."

Minerva walked up to the group. "Where are Miss Delacour and Mr. Potter?"

"I'm here, Professor." Jamie hadn't wanted to stand with his brother and so had decided to wait with Cho around the corner until he had to go in. However, he still nodded politely to Harry and Viktor.

Looking slightly ruffled, Fleur dashed into hallway with her partner, Cedric Diggory. "I am 'ere."

Minerva let out a sigh of relief. "You will enter the ballroom with your partners in this order: Miss Delacour, Mr. Krum, Mr. Lupin and finally Mr. Potter."

The four couples lined up. Harry just hoped he wouldn't make a fool of himself.

Four excruciating hours later, Harry held out his arm to Astoria. "I'll escort you back to Slytherin."

Astoria, still blushing, stood up and took Harry's arm. "Thank you, Harry."

He looked down at Auri. "Do you want me to take you back as well?"

Auri stood up. "I suppose so." Draco was out on the dance floor with Lavender Brown. "If you wouldn't mind." Auri felt miserable but just as she stepped outside the Great Hall, Draco caught up with her.

"Sorry, I forgot it was almost curfew." He smiled at Harry. "I'll take her down. You can devote your time to Astoria instead."

"Behave." Harry warned his sister, making her redden, before leaving the pair behind.

"I didn't think you were bothered about seeing me back." Auri sounded a little petulant as they slowly set off after Harry and Astoria.

"Lavender wouldn't take no for answer." Draco grinned at the girl at his side. "I think I know now why Prewett dumped her."

Auri wasn't satisfied with Draco's response. "You didn't seem to mind her that much when she was all over you."

Draco grabbed her arm and pulled her to a standstill. "Aurilia Lupin, bitchiness doesn't become you."

Auri could feel tears close to the surface at Draco's criticism. "I'm sorry. It's just that you barely said anything to me all night, you didn't really seem to want to dance with me, and then you were dancing with Lavender like that."

Draco shook his head. "Auri, if I did anything to upset you then I'm sorry, but Harry and Dudley would have my hide if I so much as breathed on you."

Auri looked up, tears making her eyelashes glisten. "You really like me then?"

Draco nodded reluctantly. "You grow on a person. However, you're two years younger than me. For the moment you'll just have to settle for being friends."

Auri grinned and threw herself into Draco's arms. "I like you too."

Harry came around the corner just as Draco was trying to disentangle himself from Auri. "Trying to force yourself on my sister, Draco?"

Draco had begun to apologize when he realized that Harry was joking with him. "For a minute there I thought you were going to hit me."

Harry laughed. "No, but I couldn't resist." He looked at sister. "You can learn to behave young lady. If I see you all over Draco like that again, then I'll be having words with Dad about your behavior."

Auri blanched. "It's not fair. I bet you wouldn't treat me like this if I was a boy."

"No, I wouldn't." Harry could see that Auri was going to be stubborn but thankfully Draco came to his rescue.

"Harry's right. I'd feel the same if it was my sister dating one of my friends." Draco told his would-be girlfriend. "Now, I'll escort you back to Slytherin, and then I'm going to return to the ball."

Somewhat chastened, Auri took Draco's arm and set off. "Night, Harry."

"Night, Auri." Harry hated threatening her with their Dad, but knew it was the only way to keep his headstrong sister in line. He decided to head back to the ball and see if Hermione wanted to dance.

When Harry arrived back, he found Lavender looking for Draco. "Have you seen Draco? He was going to have another dance with me."

Harry nodded. "He's taking my sister back to Slytherin."

Lavender fanned herself. "I'm actually feeling a little unwell. Would you mind walking outside with me for some fresh air?"

Harry did think Lavender looked a little pale. After spotting Hermione dancing with Viktor, he held out his arm to Lavender. "We can go into the garden."

Hermione felt sick as she noticed Harry and Lavender leaving the ballroom arm in arm, Lavender leaning against Harry. She turned to Viktor. "Would you excuse me for a moment? I think I need to sit down."

Viktor was immediately all concern. "Perhaps I should get you something to drink. Would that help?"

Hermione smiled sweetly at him. "Thank you." She decided that Karina was a very lucky girl to have a boyfriend like Viktor.

Viktor soon returned with the drink and sat down. "Vot is wrong?"

"Nothing; I'm just tired." Hermione lied.

"I saw Harry leave with the Gryffindor as vell." Viktor informed Hermione.

"But I'm not seeing Harry; he can leave the room with whomever he wants to." Hermione protested.

"But you'd like to, wouldn't you?" Viktor asked gently.

Hermione didn't bother to deny it. "Yes. How did you know?"

"I used to look at Karina in the same way you look at Harry. I know how it feels." Viktor put his arm around Hermione. "Go to him."

Hermione shook her head. "No. If I can't trust him now, then I can't trust him at all."

Viktor smiled. "This is why I wished to take you to the ball. You are a very sensible girl."

Hermione smiled tremulously. "Thanks, Viktor."

"You are welcome, Hermione." Viktor held out his arm. "May I escort you back to Slytherin?"

"You may." Hermione put down her drink, took Viktor's arm and left the room.

Out in the garden, Harry led Lavender to a seat. "Is this better?"

Lavender fluttered her eyes at Harry. "It is." She then patted the seat. "Why don't you sit down beside me?"

Harry sat down. "Can I fetch anyone for you?" Harry felt a little uncomfortable as Lavender slid closer to him.

"No. I think I can manage just fine." With that, Lavender slid her arms around Harry's neck, intending to kiss him.

Harry pulled back. "Lavender, what's going on?"

"I would have thought that was obvious." Lavender was a little taken aback that Harry seemed to be oblivious to her charms.

"I thought you didn't feel well." Harry could have kicked himself. "Or was I just a convenient replacement for Draco?"

"I actually prefer you to Draco." Lavender answered honestly. "It's not as if you're seeing anyone."

Harry frowned. "That doesn't mean you can flit from boy to boy."

Lavender's face fell and she started to cry. "I'm sorry."

Harry now felt bad about making her cry. "Lavender. I'm sure you're a nice girl but I don't see you that way."

"Neither does Ron." Lavender sobbed.

Harry cursed under his breath. "This is because Ron is now seeing someone else?"

Lavender nodded. "I thought if he saw me with other boys, he'd get jealous and dump Pansy."

"But he wasn't out here, and you still tried to kiss me." Harry pointed out.

"I actually like you, Harry." Lavender admitted. "But I like Ron more."

Harry was annoyed now. "What am I? Every girl's way back to their ex-boyfriend? You'll have to excuse me Lavender, but I have better things to do than make your ex jealous."

Lavender watched openmouthed as Harry stormed off.

Harry marched up the corridor only to run into Hermione and Viktor Krum. Hermione was surprised to see how angry Harry looked. She turned to Viktor. "Thank you for offering to take me back down to Slytherin, but I think Harry might be free now."

Harry nodded tersely. "Thanks Viktor."

Viktor inclined his head. "Have a good evening both."

Harry followed Hermione down the corridor towards the dungeons. "Bloody Lavender. She told me she felt unwell. When I took her outside, she had the nerve to come on to me. She then told me that she liked me better than Draco but not as much as Ron. What am I? Everyone's whipping boy?"

Hermione was secretly elated that Harry was angry but hid it. "Calm down, Harry."

Harry took a deep breath. "Sorry. She just really annoyed me." He then laughed, "I went a little off the deep end didn't I?"

"A little." Hermione admitted. "We're here. I'm staying in my parents' rooms tonight as we're leaving before breakfast."

Harry felt a little miserable at the thought of not seeing Hermione for over a week. "Well, I'll wish you a Merry Christmas now then."

"Merry Christmas, Harry." Hermione kissed his cheek. "I'll see you on Boxing Day."

"I'll be looking forward to it." Harry wanted to pull Hermione into his arms and kiss her but he didn't dare to in such a public place. Instead he placed a kiss on her knuckles before releasing her hand. "Take care."

"I will." With that, Hermione opened the door and slipped into her parents' rooms.

Feeling a lot more cheerful, Harry set off towards Ravenclaw. He'd had enough of the ball to last him a lifetime.

Boxing Day

Harry was glad that his holidays had gone by without a hitch so far. He headed downstairs to find his Dad and Georgie up. "Morning."

Nia's voice startled Harry. "Good morning, Harry."

Harry turned round to find his Mum standing in the doorway. "Mum, what are you doing here?"

"I'm getting married today." Nia looked nervously at Harry. "I wasn't quite sure where to spend the night, so Remus offered to let me stay here."

"But I thought the wedding wasn't going to be until next February." Harry could tell he'd missed something as Nia glanced at Remus.

Remus got up. "Harry, your Mum is going to have a baby, which is why she's brought the wedding forward."

Georgie let out a yell. "I'm going to have another sister?"

Nia shook her head. "Apparently I'm expecting a little brother for you."

Harry was absolutely shocked. He didn't know why, but he'd expected Nia to wait until her marriage night to sleep with Grim. Not wanting to upset his mother though, he hugged her. "I'm pleased for you."

"Really?" Nia had been frightened that Harry would react badly to the news.

"Truly. I can't wait to have a new brother." Harry reassured his mother.

"Good. I was worried you might be upset." Nia admitted before letting Harry go. "I hate to drop such a bombshell on you and run, but I need to take a shower and get ready."

"In that case I suppose I'd better go and find something to wear then." Harry tried to keep his voice sounding enthusiastic.

"There's a new suit hanging in your closet." Remus told him.

Georgie followed her mother out of the room, talking animatedly.

Remus turned to Harry. "Are you okay? I know this must be a bit of a shock for you."

Harry's ignored Remus' question. "When did you find out?"

"Christmas Eve; just after you went to stay with Lily and Sirius." Remus had been a bit surprised himself, but was pleased for ex-wife.

Harry sat down. "I must admit it is a bit of a bolt from the blue but I'm glad for Mum. She looks really happy, doesn't she?"

"She is." Remus was glad that Harry seemed to be handling the revelation well.

"Do the others know yet?" Harry helped himself to breakfast as he asked.

"Dudley found out yesterday, but Auri and Scarlett don't know yet." Remus poured himself a large coffee. "Your Mum is going to tell them before she gets changed. Once you've eaten breakfast, you'll need to go and get ready."

Harry ate his breakfast talking to Remus as he did so. Once he escaped to his room, however, he sat down on the bed. He still couldn't believe that his Mum had gotten pregnant before getting married. Knowing there was little he could do about it, Harry got up and walked into the bathroom that joined his room to get ready.

An hour later, Remus knocked on Nia's door. "Are you decent?"

Nia called out. "Come in, Remus."

"How are you feeling?" Remus thought Nia looked a little pale as she sat on the window seat.

"Just tired. I'd forgotten how much being pregnant tires you out." Nia yawned. "This is a beautiful room."

"It's supposed to be the master bedroom but Harry didn't want to sleep in here; neither did I." Remus explained. "It's a bit too floral for both of us."

“Well, as I said, it’s a lovely room.” She then became serious. “Do you think Harry is really alright?”

“I think he’s shocked but he’ll be fine.” Remus assured his ex-wife. “Are you alright?”

“I’m okay.” Nia placed a hand on her stomach. “I didn’t think I’d be having more children.”

“I have to admit to being a little shocked at the news myself.” Remus smiled.

“Not as shocked as me, believe me.” Nia grinned ruefully. “I certainly hadn’t expected to sleep with Grim before we got married, let alone get pregnant. You’d think I’d know better about having unprotected sex at my age, wouldn’t you?”

Remus laughed. “When the moment takes you, it takes you.”

“Are you seeing anyone?” Nia was concerned for her ex-husband.

“No.” Remus had enough to deal with without getting entangled in a relationship. “I’ve finally stopped hankering after what I can’t have.”

“So you’ve worked out that you’re not in love with Lily, have you?” Nia knew her insight would surprise Remus.

Remus was staggered. “How did you know?”

“I found the letters you’d kept, together with her photos. I also found the letter you must have intended to send to her but didn’t. I never said anything when I found them but I presumed you still had feelings for her.” Nia didn’t say that she’d been heartbroken when she’d found the letters and photos, more so by the letter Remus had written.

Remembering what he’d written, Remus felt awful. It had been a letter that had gone into great depth about how he’d felt about his ex-girlfriend. He’d written it as a cathartic exercise and had never intended for Lily, let alone his wife, to see it. “I’m sorry you had to see

the letter. But believe me when I say that I most definitely don't feel that way anymore about Lily."

Nia was relieved. "I'm glad. I'd hate to think of you in an unhealthy relationship pining after my sister."

"As I said, I'm over her." Remus grinned ruefully. "I've even given up my one-night stands; well at least for the time being."

"I wish you'd find someone special." Nia truly wanted everyone to be as happy as she was now.

"I thought I had. But she's marrying one of my friends." Remus shrugged. "Never mind. She's probably better off with him anyway."

"I'm sorry." Nia wondered who the woman was, but didn't like to pry. Deciding that a change of subject was in order, she stood up. "Well Remus. Are you ready to give me away?"

"I couldn't be happier to do so." Remus put out his arm for Nia to take. "Let's go make you an honest woman of you."

Harry had never seen Darcy House so beautifully decorated. Flowers adorned the stairway and the entrance to the small ballroom. "This looks great."

"Thanks." Grim smiled at the boy standing next to him.

Harry held out his hand. "Congratulations Uncle Grim. Mum told me about the baby this morning."

Grim's face was all concern. "Is she okay?"

Harry suddenly felt positive about the wedding for the first time. Grim obviously loved his Mum; it was written all over his face. "She's just fine. I think she's really excited about the wedding. You'd better go and take your place before Dudley comes over and drags you to the altar."

"I hope you didn't mind me picking Dudley to be my best man." Grim liked Harry but felt closer to Dudley.

"Not at all. I'm not a big fan of attention, so he's more than welcome to it." Harry looked to where Dudley was frowning at the two of them. "You'd better go. Dudley's going to have a fit otherwise."

Grim walked off towards Dudley to await the arrival of Nia.

At the sound of a cough, Harry looked round to find Hermione standing in the doorway. "Hi Harry."

"Hermione. I didn't know you'd been invited." Harry laughed. "Actually I only found out about the wedding myself this morning."

"Me too. It was a bit of rush to get ready in time." Hermione brushed down her robe. "I had to borrow something off Mama."

"You look lovely." Harry said honestly.

"Thanks. I think we'd better sit down." Hermione walked with Harry to take a seat near the front.

As his Mum entered on Remus' arm, Harry slipped his hand into Hermione's, who promptly shuffled closer to him. "Your Mum looks lovely."

"I know." Harry had never felt so proud of his Mum as he did then, as she stood and exchanged vows with Grim.

Remus passed Nia over to Grim before going to sit by Hermione, who was now sniffing. Remus fished inside his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief. "Blow."

Hermione gratefully used the handkerchief before sliding it into her clutch bag. Harry and Remus shared a look before returning their attention to the wedding.

Later that evening

Grim watched as Nia danced with Remus. He hadn't minded that she'd wanted Remus to give her away. He knew that there was definitely nothing between the two of them nowadays except friendship, which was probably all they should have had in the first place. However, he now had a large ready-made family because of Remus and he was grateful for that. In fact Grim still couldn't believe that he had a child of his own on the way.

Grim had been intending to wait until their wedding night to sleep with Nia, but a few months earlier, the two of them had been about to go to their separate bedrooms when he'd taken his kissing a little further than before. Nia had responded eagerly, with one thing leading to another. He had been surprised when Nia had confessed afterwards that she had thought she might be frigid but Grim had disabused her of the notion; he'd told her that she had just needed the right man. To say he'd been surprised a few months later to find out she was pregnant was something of an understatement, but they were both excited and looking forward to the new arrival.

Remus brought Nia over. "I think your wife is ready to leave." Nia kissed Remus on the cheek. "Thanks for everything."

Grim shook his hand. "Thanks Remus. I appreciate you dealing with cleaning up."

"It's nothing. I think you should both go get changed. I have a feeling that Hermione and Luna might be gearing up to catch the bouquet." Remus nodded in the direction of the two girls who had both been told about the Muggle tradition, and therefore both of them wanted to be the one to catch the coveted prize.

Twenty minutes later, Harry and the others watched as Nia and Grim left by carriage for a three day break in York. Nia had refused to portkey or apparate anywhere once she'd found out she was pregnant.

Hermione stood close to Harry, holding the precious bouquet that she'd managed to pluck out of the air. "That was a lovely wedding."

“I’m just glad it’s over. I’m shattered.” Harry was exhausted. “I didn’t expect to be attending a wedding when I woke up this morning.”

Hermione giggled. “Me neither.” Suddenly she frowned. “I’m not sure where I’m supposed to be staying tonight.”

“At Grimmauld Square with us.” Remus held out a pencil. “This is a portkey. It will take the two of you to Grimmauld Square. Dudley and Luna have just gone. Harry, your sisters have gone home with Lily. I hope I can trust you four until I get there. I just want to make sure that everything is secure here before I leave.”

Hermione took the portkey. “Don’t worry about us. What’s the password?”

“Glad Tidings.” Remus grinned at the surprised look on Hermione’s face as both she and Harry disappeared.

Hermione looked round Grimmauld Square on landing. “Very nice.”

Harry felt embarrassed. “Thanks. Let’s go find Luna and Dudley.”

Dudley had heard them arriving, and walked out of the drawing room to meet them. “Luna’s gone to bed. I think she’s had a little too much to drink.”

Harry grinned. “She did seem a little frenzied when she was dancing.”

Dudley cringed. “I’m sure I’ll have a black eye tomorrow.”

Hermione laughed. “You and a few others.”

Dudley grinned. “You’re right there. If you two will excuse me, I’m off to bed as well.”

“Dad will be here shortly.” Harry wanted to warn Dudley, just in case his brother decided to pop in on Luna before going to his own room.

“Night Harry.” Dudley had no such intention. “Night Hermione.”

"Night Dudley." Hermione followed Harry into the drawing room. "I don't suppose there's any chance of a hot chocolate is there?"

Harry called out. "Pasha." A small, obviously female, house elf appeared. "Master Harry, what's can Pasha get?"

"Two hot chocolates please." Harry collapsed into one of the high backed armchairs by the fireplace.

After Pasha brought the requisite hot chocolates, the two of them chatted until Remus appeared. "I thought you'd have gone to bed by now."

"We just wanted something warm before we went to sleep." Harry explained before yawning. "Speaking of bed, I think it's time we made tracks. Where have you put Hermione?"

"She's in the bedroom next to yours." Remus informed him. "I'll see you both in the morning. Sleep in if you want to, as we've got nothing planned."

Harry pulled Hermione to her feet, and the two of them wished Remus goodnight before heading upstairs. Harry showed Hermione her room. "There's a bathroom through that door, and your clothes should be in the closet over there."

Hermione was glad that there was a fire burning brightly in the grate as the night was quite cold. "You've got a lovely home, Harry."

"I don't really think of it as mine. Even though Dad refuses to say it's his, that's how I view it." Harry explained. "I suppose I might feel differently about it as I get older, but I doubt it."

Hermione walked towards the door. "Thanks for showing me the room."

Harry took Hermione's hint and started to open the door to leave. "Goodnight, Hermione."

“Night, Harry.” Hermione leant forward to kiss Harry’s cheek, only for him to turn at the same moment, so that her lips met his.

Harry went to back off, and then thought better of it. Instead, he slid his arms around Hermione’s waist and drew her close to him, increasing the pressure of his lips and deepening the kiss. Hermione slid her own arms around Harry’s neck and kissed him back. Harry didn’t want the kiss to end, but eventually pulled away. “I think I’d better get to bed before my Dad comes up.”

Hermione nodded. “I think you’re right.”

Harry opened the door and slid out. Hermione made sure it was closed before running over to the bed and jumping on it. “He kissed me.” She giggled softly to herself before climbing off the bed and disappearing into the bathroom.

New Year’s Eve

Hermione was just finishing pinning up her hair when a knock at the door signaled Harry’s arrival. Hermione checked her reflection before getting up to answer the door. Harry hadn’t kissed her since Boxing Day, and she was hoping that her slightly more adult dress and make-up would help to encourage him to do so again. She opened the door. “Hi, Harry.”

Harry’s mouth fell open, before he quickly closed it. Hermione’s dress was made of a silvery material which shimmered as she moved. Her upswept hair made her look older, as did the small touches of cosmetics she had used. “You look wonderful.”

Hermione blushed. “Thanks. We’d better go downstairs. I’m sure your Dad will be waiting for us.”

Harry stepped aside to let Hermione out of the bedroom, before following her down the wide staircase. He’d barely reached the bottom when Pasha appeared with an envelope on a silver platter. Harry had tried to stop the elf from using the platter, but she’d cried when he asked her to stop, so he had had to let her continue.

Pasha bowed low. "This is for you, Master Harry."

"Thanks, Pasha." Harry took the envelope and turned it over. A seal he didn't recognize prevented anyone from opening the envelope.

Hermione looked over his shoulder. "That's expensive parchment. Whoever sent that must have quite a bit of money."

Harry didn't like to tell her that the stationery desks in both his bedroom and the study were filled with similar parchment and envelopes. "Probably."

Hermione too didn't recognize the seal. "Aren't you going to open it?"

Harry walked into the study and picked up a silver letter opener bearing the Potter family crest, before sliding it through the seal. He carefully tipped the contents of the envelope onto the desk. "Nice card as well."

Hermione tactfully stood back. "Is it from someone you know?"

Harry looked at the card, and read it out loud.

'Dear Harry

I'm so sorry that our last meeting was cut short but I look forward to your company again so that we can finish our business.

Look for me!

A Friend.'

Hermione gasped. "It's from Amicus isn't it?"

Remus chose that moment to stroll into the study. "What is?"

Hermione swung round; she was surprised to see Remus dressed in an extremely fashionable dark green, almost black suit. A similarly colored cloak completed his ensemble. Even though he was older than her, and her friend's father, Hermione couldn't help but notice

how striking he looked in the outfit. Pulling herself together she nodded towards the desk. "That card."

Harry had seen Hermione's reaction to his Dad's appearance, and felt a little disappointed that she hadn't reacted in the same way to him. "I opened the envelope with the letter opener and let it drop onto the table. As I didn't know who it was from, I didn't want to touch it."

"Good thinking. May I?" Remus held out his hand for the envelope. He scowled as looked at the seal. "That's Amicus' seal."

"Is the card a portkey?" Harry was concerned about someone touching it and disappearing.

Remus pulled out his wand to cast a detection spell. "No, it's safe to touch." To be sure, Remus picked up the card himself first. "He's playing with you."

Hermione shivered. "Do you think he's coming after Harry?"

Remus reluctantly nodded. "I'm afraid he is." He turned to his son. "Do you still want to go tonight?"

Harry looked at Hermione who shrugged. "I do. If I have to worry about him suddenly appearing all the time, I'd be permanently unable to go anywhere. Do you really think he'd attempt anything in the middle of a Ministry ball?"

Remus shook his head. "I doubt it."

Hermione cast tempus. "I think we'd better get going. I don't think it's a good idea to be fashionably late to a Ministry ball."

Remus smiled. "You're quite right. Let's be off."

The Ministry New Year Ball

Remus headed over to where Arthur and his wife were seated. "Andy, Arthur, how are you both?"

Arthur's face lit up. "Better now that you're here. I was getting worried that I'd be stuck with Smithers and his friends from the fourth floor."

Andy nudged her husband. "Arthur, keep your voice down. Nicholas will hear you."

Nym was practically drooling as she looked at Remus. "Hi, Mr. Lupin."

"Nym, you can call me Remus, you know." Remus felt a little uncomfortable at the look Nym was giving him, particularly after learning that the alternate Remus and Nym had been involved. Remus knew, however, that there was absolutely no chance he would ever feel that way about the girl in front of him, no matter how pleasant she was.

"Okay." Nym blushed.

Andy saw how her daughter was reacting and was grateful when she realized that Remus wasn't going to encourage her. "Are all of the children here?"

Remus shook his head. "Luna, Dudley and Scarlett are at home with Nia and Grim."

"So the twins and Harry are here then?" Arthur asked.

Remus grinned. He knew that Arthur enjoyed talking to Harry about Muggle things, even though his son wasn't that au fait with everything in the Muggle world. "They are. Harry's escorting Hermione as Dae can't make it this evening; touch of dragon flu." Dae had actually come down with a really bad case of dragon flu when he'd gone to investigate the early hatching of the dragon eggs that were supposed to be used for the tournament. Unfortunately dragon flu was something that incubated for up to a month before coming out. Dae had been infected more than six weeks ago and was still in isolation. Anna had decided to stay at home, rather than attend the Ball alone.

"It's nice that Hermione's got such a good friend." Andy thought that Harry had feelings for Hermione but she wasn't sure if Remus was aware as well.

Remus nodded. "It is."

"So where are the twins?" Nym asked, fluttering her eyelashes in what she hoped was an appealing fashion.

Remus had to hide his smile at Nym's transparent attempt to flirt with him. "Georgie's coming with Neville Longbottom, and Auri's been staying with the Delaneys. Draco Black's bringing her tonight."

"That's quite a pureblood catch, Remus." Arabella Zabini's voice interrupted the group.

Remus immediately stood up and bowed to Arabella. "Madam Zabini, how nice to see you."

Arabella smiled seductively at Remus as she let her eyes run down his body. "I can only say the same about you, and, as I've told you before, please call me Arabella."

Remus inclined his head slightly. "Arabella, are you here alone?"

She nodded. "Blaise is escorting his fiancée, and I thought I'd tag along."

Remus could see that neither Andy nor Nym liked the woman, and he decided to do them both a favor. "Would you care to dance?"

Arabella smiled. "I'd be delighted."

Remus held out his hand and led the woman off. Nym pouted. "Tart."

Andy pretended to be shocked. "Nym!"

"Oh come on, Mum, she was all over Remus." Nym protested. "If he'd been a piece of pie, she'd have eaten him up."

Arthur hid his grin at his daughter's apt description. "Nym, behave."

“I’m going for some fresh air.” Nym flounced off, only to bump into Kingsley Shacklebolt. “Hello, Sir.”

“Are you alright, TW?” Kingsley had a soft spot for his trainee; in fact he was quite taken with her but hadn’t been able to pursue her due to their working relationship. This was something he hoped to change when she moved to Gresley Wyndham’s team next week.

Nym liked that Kingsley didn’t call her by her first name. He’d started called her ‘TW’ just after she’d started auror training. “I’m fine. We were just invaded by Arabella Zabini. She practically threw herself at Remus.”

“Remus Lupin?” Kingsley was more than aware of who Remus was and of his connections in the Ministry.

Nym nodded her head glumly. “He took her off to dance.”

It was then that Kingsley realized that Nym was quite taken with Remus. “Would you like to dance me with instead?”

Wanting to take her mind off Remus and Arabella, Nym nodded. “Let’s go.”

Andy smiled as she watched the good looking black man steer her daughter towards the area of the ballroom allocated for dancing. She just hoped that Kingsley had nerves of steel as Nym wasn’t exactly the most graceful girl on two feet.

On the far side of the ballroom, Arabella was impressed by Remus’ confident handling of her. She looked up at him. “Would you like to leave?”

Remus was torn. He didn’t really like Arabella, but he also knew that what she wanted wasn’t his friendship. Regretfully, he knew he’d have to decline. “Normally I’d love to, but as you’ve already heard me mention, my young daughters are attending tonight, and I’m escorting them home.”

Arabella sighed. “Pity. Perhaps another time?”

“Perhaps.” Remus escorted Arabella to the edge of the dance floor, before kissing her hand. He then set off in the direction of Leo, who he’d spotted on the far side of the room.

A few tables up from Leo and his Dad, Harry was seated next to Hermione. His sisters and their escorts were also there. “It looks as if they put these tables out especially for us.” Soft drinks had been placed on the table instead of the bottles of wine that adorned most of the other tables. In fact several tables had been similarly laden with soft drinks. Jamie, Cho, Anna and Orion were seated on a similar table across the room, a few tables down from their parents.

Hermione nodded. “Papa said that the Ministry likes to encourage independence among young adults but not drinking.”

George sighed. “That figures. I was looking forward to sneaking a glass of wine or two.”

Katie nudged him. “It’s not as if you didn’t have a few glasses before we left.”

George reddened. “Your Dad offered. It would have been rude to decline.”

Harry grinned at his friend. “Of course it would, George.” He turned to Hermione. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

Slightly distracted by watching everyone walking around, Hermione looked up. “Where are you going?”

Harry leant closer to her to whisper quietly in her ear. “The bathroom.”

Hermione blushed. “Sorry.”

“I won’t be long.” Harry left the ballroom and quickly found the opulent facilities laid out for the male guests. After using them and washing his hands, Harry set back off towards the ballroom. He hadn’t gone far when he sensed someone behind him. About to swing round, a

voice he didn't know stopped him from doing so. "Don't turn around. If you do, I'll kill you."

Harry felt a wand tip sticking into his neck. "What do you want?"

"Open the door on the left." The voice ordered.

Harry opened the door which he was standing adjacent to, and was roughly pushed inside. Not daring to look round, he stayed still until a voice he recognized greeted him. "Hello Harry; you can turn around now."

"What do you want?" Harry swung round and unholstered his wand. "And how did you manage to get in here?"

Amicus ignored Harry's second question but answered his first. "As I said on my card, we have unfinished business. I'd like to challenge you to a duel. If you beat me, I'll let you return to the ball."

"And if I refuse?" Harry tried to keep his voice even. He knew that he couldn't portkey or apparate out to safety as only Ministry approved portkeys were allowed. The floo network had been opened up to allow guests to arrive and depart, and so most people had arrived that way.

"Then I'll simply kill you." Amicus' wand appeared in his hand, almost as if from nowhere. "So, do you accept my challenge, Harry?"

"I don't really have much choice, do I Amicus?" Harry ground out. "So let's do this."

Amicus knew that Harry was frightened but he admired the fact that he didn't back down or try to run. "Just before we start, I'd like to put one precaution in place."

Harry felt a ward spring up. "What have you done?"

"I don't want you pulling the same stunt you did the last time we fought. I prefer my opponents to remain in human form." Amicus informed Harry.

Harry knew he was in trouble; he couldn't apparate, nor could he portkey, and it appeared that Amicus had also taken the option of transforming away from him. He just hoped that Hermione would become concerned as to his whereabouts, and alert someone to his absence. "Twenty paces?"

Amicus nodded and walked the requisite distance from Harry before turning to bow to his opponent. Harry imitated him before moving into a dueling stance.

Amicus threw the first spell. "Let's start simply shall we?" He then let fly with an undemanding stunner which Harry easily avoided.

"I agree." Harry returned the same spell at Amicus, who also effortlessly sidestepped it.

Amicus ducked as Harry's second stunner came hurtling towards him. "Perhaps something a little more entertaining?" He then fired off a bone-breaking spell.

Harry threw up a shield which deflected the spell, before returning fire with a conjunctivitis spell which forced Amicus to invoke a shield of his own.

Amicus dropped the shield. "Nice work, Harry. Let's see how you like this."

Harry threw up a shield of his own as a bright purple spell he didn't recognize headed his way, only for the shield to explode under the force of the spell, leaving Harry open to the second spell that Amicus cast. Throwing himself on the floor to avoid the spell, Harry yelled out "Petrificus Totalus" at Amicus as he landed on his stomach.

Amicus swiftly sidestepped the spell before sending two more spells hurtling towards Harry, both of which struck his leg. Harry screamed as he felt the bones in his knee shatter under the bone-breaking curse, before a chunk of flesh was ripped away as the reducto curse caught him as he tried to twist away.

“Not exactly original are you? They’re the same spells you used on me at the World Cup.” Harry gasped out as he struggled to climb to his feet. “I thought a renowned dueler like yourself would have something a little more interesting up his sleeve.”

Instead of getting angry as Harry had expected, Amicus merely laughed. “I really do like you. Are you sure you won’t reconsider following in your father’s footsteps?”

Harry shook his head. “Go to hell.”

Amicus wagged a finger as a blasting spell headed his way, forcing him to drop to the floor. “That wasn’t nice, Harry.”

Harry gulped as Amicus’ next spell sent a bright white wave of light heading towards him. He barely had time to throw up a shield before it impacted him, knocking him into the air and onto the floor. As he hit the ground, he felt his shattered knee twist and give way from under him. Keeping his head even in such a prone position, Harry sent a reducto curse back at Amicus, clipping the Death Eater on the side of his left arm.

Amicus looked down at his arm, before shaking his head. “I’m afraid that’s where things have to come to an end, Harry. I can’t allow you to do any more damage to me. I need to rejoin the ball in one piece.”

Lying on the floor, Harry knew that he wasn’t going to come out of the duel alive. Desperately he duplicated his previous curse. “Reducto.”

Amicus sidestepped the curse before blasting Harry into the air once more; this time when Harry hit the floor he didn’t get up. Amicus stood over the boy. “You fought well, Harry. I’ll be seeing you again.”

Amicus then dropped a Ministry approved portkey onto him. Only once Harry had disappeared, did Amicus cast a spell on his arm to repair the damage to both it and his jacket, before removing his mask, and leaving the room.

Next Chapter: This should be up by the end of the week.

Chapter 44: A Day in the Life

New Year's Eve – 31st December 1994

Hermione chatted absently to Georgie as she waited for Harry to return. After ten minutes had gone by and there was still no sign of him, Hermione began to get a little worried. "Georgie, I'll be back in a minute. There's a school matter I just need to check on with your Dad."

Georgie rolled her eyes, imagining that Hermione had a history question for her Dad. "I thought you'd at least be able to wait until we got on the train to go back to school."

Hermione laughed convincingly. "You know me. I'll be back shortly."

Hermione carefully picked her way through the crowd, and slipped into the spare seat next to where Remus and Leo were talking. "I'm sorry to interrupt, Remus." Remus had asked Hermione to call him by his first name when she wasn't in school. "But Harry went to the bathroom over ten minutes ago, and he hasn't come back. After Amicus' note, I'm a little concerned."

Remus quickly scanned the room. "I can't see him anywhere. I'll go check the bathroom." He turned to Leo. "Can you stay with Hermione?"

Hermione stood up. "I'm coming with you." Seeing Remus' look, she hurriedly disabused him of his obvious worry. "Not into the men's bathroom, but I'm at least going to stand outside the door."

Leo also stood up. "We might as well all go."

The three of them made their way out of the ballroom and down the long corridor which led to the bathroom facilities. Remus went in, only to come back out alone within a few minutes. "He's not there."

"Perhaps he saw someone he knew." Leo suggested.

"What's going on?" Neville's voice interrupted the three of them.

"Harry's missing." Hermione was now starting to feel really afraid. She looked round before lowering her voice. "He received a note from Amicus earlier this evening saying that they had unfinished business. Harry went out to the bathroom some time ago, and I haven't seen him since. Remus has checked the bathroom and he's not there."

Neville was astounded. "He still came to a public ball even after receiving a note like that?"

Remus nodded. "He said he wasn't going to be forced to stay in by him."

"We need to look for him." Leo suggested. "I'll search the left hand side of the ballroom with Hermione. Remus, you two take the right."

After fifteen minutes exhaustive searching there was still no sign of Harry. By now Hermione was beside herself with worry. "He's taken him, hasn't he?"

Remus glanced around the corridor. "Did anyone check these rooms out?"

Leo nodded. "We did. They're all empty. He has to have taken him."

"I don't see how. There's no way to have gotten him out of here without everyone seeing unless he had..." Remus frowned. "Unless he had a Ministry approved portkey. Damn, I should have thought of that. I've got to go."

Neville slipped his arm around Hermione, who had begun to shake, and addressed Remus. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Sorry, Neville but I don't think where I'm going is exactly suitable for you." Remus started to walk back towards the ballroom entrance.

Hermione's shaky voice interrupted him. "You're going to Voldemort, aren't you?"

Remus was glad that he'd gotten used to Harry and Hermione both referring to the Dark Lord by his true name. Neville, however, hadn't and shuddered. "Can't you call him something else, Hermione?"

Hermione looked defiant. "No, Neville, I can't. That's his name and that's what I'm going to call him." She looked pleadingly at Remus. "Can't I at least accompany you to the front door or something?"

"There is no front door as such." Remus gave a bitter smile. "You have to apparate in using the Dark Mark. If I took you with me, it would be assumed that I'd taken you there as your sponsor."

Hermione shrugged, her voice rising slightly. "I don't care. If Harry's in there, I'm going along as well."

Neville let go of Hermione and faced her. "Don't be stupid. Harry wouldn't want you to do that. He'd kill his Dad for taking you there."

Knowing Neville was right, Hermione backed down. "In that case, I'd like to go back to Grimmauld Square, just in case Harry returns there."

Leo whispered something to Remus that Hermione couldn't hear, before turning to her. "I'll take you."

Leo and Hermione headed for the direction of the floo departure point, Remus and Neville walking behind them.

Remus spoke quickly to Neville. "Can you go back and sit the girls? I don't want them to become alarmed if I don't return. If I don't get back before it's time to go, contact Leo via floo and he'll come and escort both girls home."

Neville didn't really want to stay but he knew that Remus didn't want the girls to find anything out. "Of course. I hope that Harry is okay."

"Me too, Neville, me too." Remus then began to walk towards the apparition point, only to run into Sirius who was walking back towards the ballroom. "Sirius, you haven't seen..."

Sirius interrupted him. "If you're going to ask about Harry, Nigel sent me an urgent message. Harry's at St. Mungo's. I don't know any more than that."

Remus called out to Leo and Hermione, stopping them from entering the fireplace. "Harry's at St. Mungo's."

Hermione's legs threatened to give out in relief, and she leant against Leo. Leo immediately slipped his arm around her. "Take Hermione with you. I'll stay here with Neville and take the girls home. I'll tell them that Harry hurt himself, and you've taken him to St. Mungo's."

Remus was grateful for his friend's help. "Thanks Leo. I've got to go. Come on Hermione."

Hermione took a deep breath and walked on shaky legs over to where Remus was standing. The two of them then hurried off towards the apparition point. Leo looked at Sirius. "Aren't you going as well?"

"I need to tell Lily." With that Sirius disappeared into the ballroom.

Leo turned to Neville. "Let's go tell the girls."

St. Mungo's

Remus ran up to the information desk, ignoring the admiring look the nurse sitting behind it was giving him. "I'm Remus Lupin, and I'm looking for my son, Harry."

The nurse immediately became all businesslike. "He appeared in the foyer. He's on the fourth floor in the Black Wing. Room 4C."

"Thank you." Remus grabbed Hermione by the hand and led her to the elevator, before turning to her. "Take the elevator. I'll meet you in Harry's room."

Hermione didn't have a chance to say anything as Remus rushed off to climb the stairs. Hermione knew she didn't possess the ability to keep up with Remus, and so she resignedly cursed as she waited for what must have been the slowest elevator in existence.

When she finally reached 4C, she could hear voices coming from inside. Tentatively she knocked on the door and went in when Remus' voice called out to her. Pushing the door fully open Hermione saw a conscious, but pale Harry lying against the pillows. Relief flooded her and she burst into tears. Remus moved across the room and pulled Hermione into his arms, stroking her hair as she cried. "He's going to be just fine."

In the bed Harry scowled. Even though he knew that Hermione was upset, he still didn't like her being held by his Dad, particularly after the look she'd given his Dad earlier. His scowl vanished when Hermione pulled away and Harry could see how upset she was. "I'm fine, Hermione. Well, not exactly fine."

Hermione's voice was shaking. "What did he do to you?"

"Shattered my kneecap, broke a few bones in my leg, and blew a large chunk of flesh out of my leg." Harry admitted.

Remus led Hermione to a chair at the side of the bed. "Sit here. Harry's not being entirely honest. He's also been treated for a mild concussion, and the effects of the blood clotting curse."

"Amicus tried to stop Harry's blood from flowing?" Hermione was shocked.

"Actually he saved Harry's life. Harry was bleeding out from the injury on his leg. By using that curse, and portkeying him here, Amicus made sure that Harry survived." Remus was horrified by how close he'd come again to losing his son.

Sirius poked his head around the door at that moment. "Can I come in?"

Harry's face lit up. "Sirius! Healer Crump said you were at the ball."

"Nigel firecalled me to come in. Lily will be here shortly. What happened?" Sirius asked.

Harry, who had only briefly outlined what had happened to his Dad, filled all three of them fully in on the events of the evening.

Now Hermione was confused. "But why would Amicus save Harry's life? From what he's just said, I'd say he was intending to kill him. "

"I don't know." Remus too was baffled. "But I suspect he's playing with him."

"That's what I thought." Harry told her. "What's more fun for a sick bastard than to take someone to the brink of death; let them think they're going to die, and then provide them with help?"

Sirius looked contemplative. "Do you really think he's playing with you?"

Harry nodded. "I'm convinced he is. It's why I don't know. I think that maybe it's some sort of sick revenge for attacking him at the World Cup."

"Perhaps he does really like you." Sirius suggested. "You said that he did."

Harry snorted. "Despite his claim to, somehow I find that hard to believe."

Sirius didn't get a chance to say anything else as Lily shot into the room. "Harry. I was so frightened when Sirius told me you'd been admitted to St. Mungo's."

"I'm fine Maman." Harry hugged Lily, who had gently wrapped her arms around him, not wanting to damage him. "I just had a little run in with Amicus."

Lily blanched. "Sirius didn't tell me that."

"Because Harry only told me when I got here." Sirius put an arm around his wife. "Sit down. I'm going to speak to Nigel, and I'll be back in a little while."

Remus turned to Hermione and Lily. "Would you two mind if I have a quick word with Harry alone?"

Both women got up and left the room. Remus turned to Harry and pulled out a small box from his pocket. "What do you want me to do with this?"

"Put it back in the vault." Harry sounded dejected.

Remus laid a hand on Harry's head. "I'm sorry it didn't go as planned."

"I think I wasted your time asking you to get it out." Harry sighed, and looked worriedly at Remus. "You remember that I kissed Hermione on Boxing Day?"

"Well, your stammering confession to me that you had, kind of sticks in my mind." Remus couldn't resist teasing his son.

"Well after that, she didn't give me any indication that she did like me." Harry looked miserable. "I think I made a mistake in thinking she likes me as anything more than a friend. I made up my mind this evening that I was going to wait a little longer before asking her to become my girlfriend or get engaged."

Remus wasn't entirely surprised. "This is why I wouldn't let you become engaged to her the first time. Was it just the way she acted that that made you change your mind?"

Harry blushed. "No. You should have seen the way she looked at you when you walked into the study."

When Remus realized where Harry's worries had stemmed from, he burst out laughing. "Harry, just because women look at men like that doesn't mean that they're going to do anything about it. It's only natural. Men do exactly the same to women."

Harry's face fell. "I wanted her to look at me like that."

Remus' laughter immediately stopped, and he sat gingerly down on the bed. "Harry, Hermione cares about you a great deal. When we found out you were missing, and she learnt that I was going to the Dark Lord to find you, Hermione wanted to come with me."

Harry was dismayed. "You weren't thinking of taking her there with you, were you?"

Remus shook his head. "Of course not. I explained to her that if I did, everyone would think that I was her sponsor and she'd gone there to join." Remus stroked Harry's hair. "She said she didn't care. Harry I think she was genuinely willing to join the Dark Lord if it meant finding you."

Harry was both shocked and elated at the same time. "I was so worried that I'd messed up when I kissed her." Harry looked up at his Dad. "I'm really confused."

Remus still wasn't convinced that Harry's feelings for Hermione were more than puppy love, but he didn't want to bring his son down any more than he already was that night. "I'll put this in the safe at home. If you want it back at any time, let me know." His face became serious. "You do know that even if you do become engaged to her, that you can still back out at any time?"

"I do." Harry smiled up at his Dad. "Thanks Dad."

"You're welcome Harry." Remus placed a kiss on Harry's forehead before getting up. "I'll go fetch the others before they wonder what I've done with you."

At Remus' urging, Hermione went back into Harry's room while Remus remained outside talking to Lily and Sirius. "I'm really glad you're alright."

Harry wanted to see Hermione's reaction for himself. "Dad told me you were going to follow him to Voldemort's place."

"He wouldn't let me." Hermione looked stubborn. "I would have gone."

"I'd rather you didn't." Harry told her. "No matter what."

"I don't know what I'd do without you." Hermione admitted. "Apart from my family, you're the one person who I care about more than anything."

Harry suddenly felt a little better. "I feel the same about you. Do you want sit by me?"

"Are you sure this is alright? I won't hurt you will I?" Hermione didn't sit down until Harry grabbed her hand and pulled her towards him.

"Hermione, can I ask you something?" Harry asked quietly.

"Of course you can." Hermione smiled brightly.

"Do you like my Dad?" Harry knew he was probably opening up a can of worms, but he had to know.

"Of course I do." Hermione was surprised at Harry's question. "He's actually my favorite teacher."

"I don't mean like that." Harry clarified his question. "I mean, as in do you think he's attractive."

Hermione, like Remus had, burst out laughing. "He is attractive but I don't like him like that. Whatever gave you that idea?"

"I saw how you looked at him earlier." Harry admitted, not quite meeting Hermione's eyes.

"Oh Harry." Hermione felt awful that she'd upset her friend. "Your Dad is very good looking. I couldn't help but notice how great he looked. It doesn't mean that I think of him in a romantic way."

Harry was relieved. "Sorry, but when I saw you dressed up this evening I just thought..."

"I know what you thought." Hermione leant over and gently kissed Harry on the cheek.

Harry put his hand to his cheek. "Sorry."

Hermione shook her head. "It's okay, Harry." She looked down at her hands. "It's actually you I like."

Harry wished he wasn't in bed at that moment. "I really like you as well."

It was now Hermione's turn for a question. "Why didn't you kiss me again after Boxing Day?"

Harry frowned. "I thought you weren't interested. I actually wondered if I'd upset you when I kissed you then."

Hermione couldn't believe how blind they'd both been. "Harry, I dressed up like this today for you." She sighed. "I was hoping you'd kiss me again."

Harry grinned. "I'd like to right now but I doubt you'd enjoy it. I took Skele-Gro just before you arrived."

Hermione pulled a face. "I think I'll pass then."

Harry played with his sheet. "Hermione, when we go back to school, would you like to go to Hogsmeade with me?"

"I'd love to." Hermione slipped her hand into Harry's and kissed him once more on the cheek. "Sorry, but I'm not willing to risk the Skele-Gro, now matter how much I want to kiss you properly."

Harry laughed just as Sirius and the others came back in. "Harry, we're going to have to be going soon. As you're Nigel's patient this time, he wants to check you over before you get some sleep."

Hermione took the hint and stood up. "Happy New Year, Harry."

"Happy New Year, Hermione." Harry squeezed Hermione's hand before letting it go.

Lily, Sirius and Remus all followed suit and wished Harry a happy new year before everyone left to return home. Remus turned to Sirius and Lily. "I'm probably going to come back after I take Hermione to Grimmauld Square. Leo is with the girls at the moment. I'll ask him if he can stay with them."

Sirius placed a hand on Remus' arm. "Harry will be okay now."

Remus shook his head. "I'm not leaving my son alone in a public place. Amicus could easily stroll in here and finish him off."

"Would you like me to contact the Ministry and arrange for Auror protection for him?" Sirius offered.

"I'd prefer to watch over Harry myself, but thanks." Remus turned to Hermione. "Let's get you back to Grimmauld Square. Harry should be home in the morning." Seeing her about to protest, he played his trump card. "If Amicus does come here, I don't want to have to worry about defending you as well as Harry."

Hermione knew when she was beaten. "I'll go back. You don't need to come with me though, I can floo. Harry included me in the wards, so I've got no problem getting in."

Harry hadn't told Remus about it, but Remus wasn't really surprised. "Thanks but I'd prefer to make sure you're okay."

"I'll take her, Remus." Lily stepped up. "Sirius can collect the children from the ball."

Sirius smiled at his wife. "I'll get them and take them home." He then kissed her softly. "Stay with the girls if you want to. I can take care of our lot until morning. Leo can go home then, as I'm sure he's got better things to do than sit around with a bunch of adolescents."

Lily looked at Remus. "Is that okay with you?"

"It will be a big help." Remus then bade them all goodnight before going back into Harry's room.

Lily put her arm around Hermione's shoulders. "Let's go then. We'll floo together. Even though we're both keyed into the wards, I'd still rather floo with you to make sure you arrive safely."

Sirius watched as they vanished from the fireplace before stepping in and flooing out.

Grimmauld Square

Leo walked out in the hallway as the fireplace flared up. "Lily, what are you doing here?"

"She's come to stay with me and the girls." Hermione stepped out from behind Lily.

"Is Harry okay?" Leo asked.

Hermione filled him in. "He's going to be fine. Some spell damage but Remus thinks he'll be out in the morning." She yawned. "I didn't expect you back yet."

"Both girls wanted to come home just in case there was news of Harry." Leo explained. "They think he slipped and badly hurt himself. They're both in their bedrooms."

Hermione hugged Lily. "I'll go tell them he's fine. Goodnight both."

"Goodnight Hermione." Lily felt drained. "I'm not trying to push you out, but if you want to go, I can stay with the girls."

Leo shook his head. "That's okay. I don't have anywhere else I need to be."

"Shall we go investigate Remus' wine collection then? I could do with a glass of wine right now." Lily led the way to the upstairs wine storage facility.

Even as a pureblood, Leo was impressed. "Wow. That's some wine collection."

Lily grinned. "That's not even a small portion of it. Harry had this room installed as a Christmas present for Remus, together with a small selection of wine from his private cellar."

Leo was amazed. "Harry really does consider this house to be Remus', doesn't he?"

Lily smiled. "Harry won't hear of Remus moving out. He calls this place Remus', even though it does actually belong to the Potter Estate."

Leo scanned the bottles of wine. "Red or white?"

"Red please." Lily watched as Leo withdrew a bottle of red and then expertly opened it. "You know your wine."

"It was part of my pureblood upbringing. While having anything to do with the household running was taboo of course, knowing your alcohol was essential." Leo explained as he poured out the wine and passed a glass to Lily.

"So that explains how Sirius knows his wines. He's always shrugged it off as a simple love of wine when I've asked." Lily smelt the wine before taking a mouthful. "That's good."

"For some of us it merely is a love of wine. I certainly appreciate a good wine, and not just because of my upbringing." Leo stepped back to allow Lily to leave the wine room. "Let's go sit in the drawing room."

Lily sighed. "I expected to have problems with Jamie being the Boy Who Lived, but I certainly didn't expect to have go through this with Harry."

Leo could see that Lily was deeply worried. "You're not alone. Since I first met Harry I've found him polite, courteous and initially inconspicuous; he was one of the last people I'd ever have thought would have ran afoul of someone like Amicus."

“Let’s hope that this is the last time.” Lily laughed, and ran a hand through her hair; lifting up a hank of it. “I’m sure I’ve got more grey hairs from Harry than from all the other children combined.”

Leo took hold of the tress Lily had lifted up. “I can’t see a single grey hair here, just your normal beautiful red hair.”

Lily wasn’t quite sure how to take Leo’s compliment, so she decided to joke about it. “Thanks. But believe me when I say that I’ll probably be entirely grey before Harry leaves school.”

Realizing that he’d made Lily feel uncomfortable, Leo let go of her hair. “If you do, then you can just use a glamour. I’m sure Sirius won’t care either way.”

Lily relaxed when Leo mentioned Sirius. “I don’t think so either.”

The two of them then chatted companionably about the children and the evening’s occurrences until the clock began to strike midnight. Lily glanced up. “Oh my, I didn’t realize it was so late.”

Leo got up and put down his wine glass. “Happy New Year, Lily.”

“Happy New Year, Leo.” Lily put down her almost empty wine glass and stood up, stumbling as she did so.

Leo grabbed her, stopping her from tumbling to the floor. Holding her in his arms, Leo couldn’t resist; Lily’s lips were only a hair’s breadth away from his. “I’m sorry.”

Lily frowned. “For what?”

“For this.” Leo closed the distance and covered Lily’s lips with his own. Surprised, Lily initially offered no resistance, and Leo groaned as he deepened the kiss.

Neither of them noticed the almost imperceptible crack in the hallway. Sirius walked in to find Lily in Leo’s arms. “What the fuck is going on?”

Lily gasped and pulled away from Leo. "It's not what you think, Sirius."

Sirius' voice became soft and silky. "And exactly what do I think, Lily?"

Leo intervened. "It's not Lily's fault. I took advantage of her."

"She didn't seem to be putting up much of a fight." Sirius' voice was deadly calm.

"I was surprised." Lily admitted. "You walked into the room just as I was about to pull away."

"Come here." Sirius ordered.

Feeling a little unnerved, Lily walked over to Sirius' side, only for him to grasp her chin firmly in his hand. "What are you doing?"

"Look at me." Sirius demanded.

Lily started as she felt Sirius invade her mind. After a few moments, the pressure ended.

Sirius walked up to Leo. "If you so much as lay a finger on my wife again, I'll kill you. Do you understand?"

Leo nodded. "I'm sorry."

"I don't want to hear it." Sirius snapped. "Never touch what belongs to me ever again."

Despite the situation, Lily felt incensed at Sirius' description of her as belonging to him. "I'm not a piece of luggage."

Sirius swung round on his wife. "I suggest you shut up."

Lily was a little taken aback at Sirius' vehemence but given the compromising position he'd found her in, she fell silent.

"Simultas, you can take care of Remus' kids for him. I'm taking MY wife home." Sirius marched over to Lily, and roughly took her arm.

Leo watched as Sirius side apparated Lily out of the house. He sank down heavily onto the sofa. He just hoped that Sirius wouldn't do anything to Lily because of him.

New Year's Day

Remus flooded home with Harry in his arms. "Did you have to carry me?"

"Yes." Remus continued to carry Harry until he reached the sitting room, and put him down on the sofa. "I'll take you up to your room when you've eaten."

Harry pulled a face. "I don't want to go to my room. Can't I stay here?"

"As long as you promise to stay lying there." Remus told him. "I promised Healer Crump you wouldn't do anything else except relax if he was willing to let you go."

"I promise I'll just lie here." Harry eagerly reassured his Dad.

"Harry!" Auri's scream interrupted them. "Mr. Simultas told me you'd fallen; are you okay? Hermione said you would be but I wanted to make sure."

"I'm fine. I've just got to take it easy. I damaged my kneecap when I fell." Harry stuck to the story Leo had obviously told his sister.

"Good." Satisfied that her brother was alright, Auri went off in search of her sister and food.

"Well that was short and sweet." Harry looked round. "I thought you said Maman would be here."

Leo walked into the room. "She went home last night. I said I'd stay with the girls." He turned to Remus. "Can I have a word?"

Remus followed Leo out of the room. He was surprised when Leo invoked a privacy bubble. "What's wrong?"

Leo sighed. "I kissed Lily last night."

Remus hadn't expected Leo to tell him that. "What the hell were you playing at?"

"I'm in love with her, Remus. I have been for a long time." Leo admitted. "She stumbled when she was getting up off the sofa, I caught her and lost my head. Sirius apparated in and caught me kissing her."

"Shit." Remus knew what a temper Sirius had. "Is Lily alright?"

Leo shrugged. "I don't know. I think so."

Remus cancelled the bubble. "I'll be back shortly."

Before Leo could do anything, Remus apparated out.

"Where's Remus gone to?" Hermione sounded worried. "Is Harry okay?"

Leo didn't answer Hermione's first question. "Harry's in the sitting room."

Hermione dashed into the sitting room.

Grimmauld Place

Remus knocked on the door. Normally he would have just apparated into the hallway, but he didn't want to interrupt anything. Sirius opened the door. "Remus, why didn't you apparate in?"

"I've just spoken to Leo." Remus answered by way of explanation.

Sirius' face darkened. "Come in."

Remus followed Sirius into his study before turning to face him. "Are you alright?"

"I am now." Sirius leant against his desk. "I wanted to kill him for touching Lily."

"Is she alright?" Remus sat down.

"She's fine." Sirius sounded a little ashamed. "I caught them kissing, and I didn't believe Lily when she said that she had been surprised and had been about to pull away." He ran a hand over the edge of his desk before looking up at Remus. "I forcibly used Legilimency on my own wife."

Remus could see that Sirius was upset about it. "I can understand why. I'd probably have done the same thing."

Sirius shook his head. "I doubt it. I hurt her, Remus, when I didn't believe her."

"But she's forgiven you now, hasn't she?" Remus asked.

Sirius nodded hesitantly. "I think she has. She's agreed to give up her job at the Ministry."

Remus felt sorry for Lily. He knew how much she loved her job. "Do you want me to tell Leo?"

"I think that's best. I wouldn't trust myself around him." Sirius got up. "Is Harry feeling okay now?"

Remus smiled. "He's just fine. He grumbled all the way home about being carried. I've threatened to keep him in bed if he doesn't take it easy."

Sirius barked out a laugh. "Good luck." He walked up to Remus. "I'm sorry you had to come over here like this. I'll let you get back to Harry."

Remus held out a hand. "Happy New Year, Padfoot."

Sirius grinned at Remus' use of his nickname. "Happy New Year, Moony." He shook Remus' hand before letting it go. "If you want to see Lily before you go, she's in the kitchen."

"I'll just nip in and see her then." Remus opened the study door and walked in the direction of the kitchen.

Lily looked up when Remus came in. "How's Harry?"

"I just brought him home." Remus sighed. "I'm sorry about what happened last night. Leo told me."

Lily sat down. "I had no idea he was going to do that. I've told Sirius I'll leave my job. There's no way I can stay there now."

Remus tilted his head and listened for a moment. He then invoked a privacy bubble. "I may have a freelance job for you. I'll let you know."

Lily frowned. "But how could you have a job for me?"

"Just trust me." Remus smiled before dropping the bubble. "I'll let Leo know you won't be back. Under the circumstances, I don't think he'll be surprised."

"Thanks, Remus." Lily was intrigued at Remus' comment and a little frustrated that he hadn't got time to tell her anything else. "Happy New Year."

Remus kissed her on the cheek. "Happy New Year, Lily. I need to get back. Nia is coming over with the rest of the family to cook a New Year's Dinner for us, and I don't want her overdoing it."

Lily was still surprised at the good friendship that now existed between her sister and Remus. "I'll let you get on then. If she needs anything you haven't got, let me know."

Remus was about to leave when Orion came into the room. "Hi Professor, I mean Uncle Remus. Mum said Harry was hurt. Is he okay?"

Remus thought Orion looked a little pale. "Hi Orion. Harry's just fine, and he'll see you on the Express tomorrow."

Orion looked pleadingly at his Uncle. "Can I come and see him now, please?"

Remus looked to Lily who turned to her son. "You'd better ask your Dad."

"Is he okay? He's look a little tired." Remus asked once Orion was out of the room.

"I think last night took it out of him." Lily informed Remus as Orion came dashing back into the kitchen a few moments later.

"Dad said yes." Orion smiled happily at his Mum. "When do I have to be back by?"

"I'll come collect you after dinner, if that's okay with Remus." Sirius walked in with Cassie trailing behind him. "Is there room for one more? Cassie doesn't want to stay home with Anna and Jamie." He lowered his voice. "I don't think she's too keen on the Prewetts."

Remus didn't mind and held out both hands. "Hold on tight."

Cassie gave a squeal of delight and shot across to hold onto her Uncle's hand. Orion copied her in a slightly more sedate manner. Remus looked over at Sirius. "Is eight o'clock okay?"

Sirius nodded. "I'll be by then."

Remus apparated home with the two children. He walked into the sitting room to find everyone, including Nia and Grim already there. Nia was fussing over Harry. She turned on seeing Remus. "Why didn't you let me know that Harry had been hurt?"

"It was a simple fall, Nia." Remus brushed off Nia's concerns. "We didn't want to bother you."

“I told you I’m alright, Mum.” Harry protested. “Dad’s already threatened me if I overdo it.”

Nia relaxed. “Sorry, but it was a bit of a shock to come in and find you like this.”

Orion and Cassie both stood hesitantly in the doorway. “Hi Auntie Nia.”

Nia’s face lit up at the sight of her niece and nephew. “Orion, Cassie. Have you come to take care of Harry?”

Cassie shook her head. “I came to get away from Jamie and Anna and their friends. I didn’t know Harry was hurt.” Lily hadn’t told her daughter as she hadn’t wanted to upset her.

Everyone laughed at the girl’s honesty. Remus put his arm around her. “Scarlett’s somewhere around if you want to go play. Pasha.”

The small elf appeared. “Yes, Master Remus?”

“Can you take Cassie to find Scarlett?” Remus asked, only for his daughter’s voice to interrupt him.

“Daddy, I’m here.” Scarlett threw herself into Remus’ arms. “I missed you last night.”

Remus kissed his daughter on her nose. “I missed you too, sweetheart. Do you want to go and play with Cassie?”

Scarlett looked at her mother. “Can we help you in the kitchen?”

Nia looked hesitantly at Harry. Remus smiled. “You can fuss over him all day if you want to. Pasha is more than capable of cooking dinner if you want to take it easy as well.”

Nia frowned, her attention now successfully diverted. “Just because I’m pregnant doesn’t mean that I can’t cook dinner.” She turned to Cassie and Scarlett “You two can help me if you want to.”

Hermione and Luna both got up. "We'll help as well."

Nia followed the girls out of the room. Georgie and Auri looked at each and disappeared before their mother could rope them in as well. Remus turned to Grimstock and Dudley. "Would you both excuse me for a moment? I need to speak to Leo before he leaves."

Remus headed for his study, leaving Leo to follow. After closing the door, Remus turned to Leo. "Lily's not going back to her job at the Ministry."

Leo was disappointed but understood. "I thought that might be the case."

"I'm going to offer her some freelance work." Remus informed his friend. "Your mother also said recently she needs an assistant. I'm sure Sirius would have no problem with a woman offering Lily work. He doesn't need to know about me."

"I'm going to have to come clean with Mum and Dad, aren't I?" Leo grimaced; he wasn't looking to explaining why his Dad's best charms expert wouldn't be returning to work. "At least Mum will be happy."

"So will I." Remus rubbed his lower back. "I need Lily to work on the intricacies of the Dark Mark."

Leo's eyebrows shot up. "We've had our best experts working on it for years, and they still haven't figured it out."

Remus shrugged. "They're not Lily. I can't take the chance that if he's finally defeated, he won't take all of us with him as a final demonstration."

Leo could understand Remus' worry. "I'd better get home and share the news."

Remus allowed himself a grin. "Good luck with that."

“And a Happy New Year to you too.” Leo made a rude gesture and headed for the fireplace.

Remus sniggered and walked back towards the sitting room.

After his Dad left the room with Leo, Harry smiled up at Orion. “Did you have a nice time last night?”

Orion shook his head. “Not really. I was really glad that Seville and her mum were there.” Orion had refused to sit with his siblings.

Grim could see that Orion wanted to talk to Harry, and so he excused himself, Dudley trailing after him. Harry too could see something was bothering Orion. “What’s wrong?”

Orion frowned. “You promise you won’t tell anyone? Not even Dad.”

“I promise.” Harry patted the sofa next to him. “Tell me what’s wrong.”

“It’s Dad and Mum. I heard them arguing last night.” Orion had heard raised voices and had slipped out of his room, concerned for his mother. “Dad was really horrible to Mum.”

“What do you mean?” Harry couldn’t believe Sirius would be horrible to Lily.

“He called her a name.” Orion’s face burned bright red.

“Do you want to tell me?” Harry asked gently.

“He called her a whore.” Orion whispered. “I think Mum slapped him. I heard more arguing and then Mum came out of the study, so I ran back to bed.”

Harry didn’t know what to think. “I don’t know what to say.”

“I do.” Remus interrupted them.

Orion now looked scared. “Uncle Remus, I err...”

"It's okay, Orion." Remus reassured him. He sighed. "I may as well tell you. Your Dad caught someone trying to kiss your Mum and thought she'd encouraged him. Your Dad is really sorry for what he said to your Mum."

"How did you know?" Orion was still frightened that Remus had overheard.

"Your Dad told me." Remus bent down so that he was at eye level with the worried boy. "I won't say anything to your Mum and Dad, so don't get worrying. They've sorted it out, so everything should be okay now."

Orion let out a sigh. "Are you sure?"

Remus nodded. "I'm sure. In fact they'll probably be spending some time together today with you two being here."

Grimmauld Place

Lily tried to relax as Sirius poured them both a glass of wine. Sirius sighed as Lily flinched when he reached out to her. "I've already said I'm sorry."

"I know, Sirius." Lily looked at the time. "It's a little early for wine isn't it?"

"I thought it might help us relax." What Sirius actually meant was that it might help Lily relax but he didn't want to antagonize her.

Lily decided Sirius was right and took the glass. "Thanks. Everything is ready for dinner tonight. Shall we go and sit down?"

Sirius followed his wife out of the room. "Do you want to go to our sitting room?"

Lily thought about it for a moment before nodding. "That's probably best."

After making her way up the stairs and into the private sitting room that adjoined their bedroom, Lily sank onto the sofa.

Sirius could see his wife was still upset over the previous evening. "What can I do to make it up to you?"

"You don't have to make it up to me." Lily knew she sounded half-hearted. "I'd have probably reacted in the same way if I'd caught you with another woman."

"That doesn't excuse me using Legilimency on you." Sirius ran his hand through his hair. "I should have believed you."

"Yes you should have." Lily snapped, and then laid a hand on Sirius' knee. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have snapped at you."

Sirius slid his arm around her. "It's my fault." He leant forward and started to nibble on Lily's neck.

Lily pulled free. "What are you doing?"

"I thought..." Sirius' voice dropped away.

Lily struggled to keep calm. "Sex doesn't solve everything Sirius. Every time we argue you seem to think that a roll in the hay will make everything alright again."

"You've never complained before." Sirius protested.

"Well I am now." Lily sighed. "Look Sirius. After our argument yesterday, the last thing I honestly want to do right now is to make love."

Sirius stood up. "You're still upset at what I called you, aren't you?"

"What do you expect?" Lily could see another argument brewing but she couldn't help herself. "One day you call me a whore and the next you expect me to sleep with you."

“How many times do I have to say I’m sorry before you believe me?” Sirius hated arguing with Lily.

“I do believe you’re sorry.” Lily was frustrated that Sirius couldn’t see what she was so upset. “It’s the fact that you called it me in the first place that bothers me.”

Sirius began to get angry. “And what do you expect? I found you in that bastard’s arms. As I said yesterday, you didn’t look as if you were exactly putting up a fight.”

“And you know I was telling the truth about being surprised.” Lily pointed out before she threw her wine glass up the wall. “Screw this. We’re just going round in circles. I’m going for a bath.”

Before Sirius could stop her, Lily had pushed past him and stomped into the bathroom, slamming the door behind her.

Sirius absently repaired the wineglass before cleaning up the wine. As he thought about Leo, he knew that the man had better keep out of his way. Dropping the wineglass onto the table, Sirius walked out.

Sanctuary

Dae glanced over as the fireplace flared up. “Leo, you finally made it.”

Leo pulled a face at his brother. “Where are Mum and Dad?”

“In the kitchen with Anna.” Dae nodded towards the blank wall. “What’s wrong?”

Leo groaned. “I think it’s better if I tell all of you together.”

Alerted by French, the missing family members walked into the living room. Peri rushed over to hug her son. “Leo, you’re a little late.”

Nic could see something was wrong. “What have you done now?”

Leo let go of his mother. “How did you know?”

“You look guilty.” Nic informed him. “So, what is it?”

Leo launched into the story of Harry and what had led to his guilty look.

Dae shook his head. “How many times did I warn you?”

Peri frowned at Dae. “You knew about this?”

Dae cringed at his mother’s stare. “Don’t look at me like that. It’s his fault Lily won’t be coming to work tomorrow.”

Anna felt uncomfortable and got up. “I think I’d better go.”

Leo shook his head. “Don’t be daft. Dae’s right. I’m the one who messed up. I’ll go.”

Peri stood in Leo’s way. “No-one’s going anywhere. Okay, so you made a mistake. It’s nothing that we can’t deal with.”

Leo smiled appreciatively at his mother. “Thanks Mum.”

Nic sighed heavily. “It looks as if you’re going to be getting the assistant you wanted after all.”

Peri smiled mischievously at her husband. “It certainly looks that way.” She put an arm around Leo. “I’ll go see Lily at the end of the week to offer the position to her. She can work from home. I can’t see her husband having a problem with that. If he does, then we’ll work round it.”

Leo led his mother to the sofa. “What would I do without such an understanding family?”

Dae punched in him arm. “Who said I understood?”

The two of them laughed and the family settled down to eat the lunch that Anna and Peri had prepared.

Grimmauld Square

Everyone had gone to bed except Remus who was busy making sure that everything was ready for the next day. A crack in the hallway alerted him to the fact that someone had apparated in. Poking his head into the corridor he was surprised to see Sirius there. "Is something wrong?"

Sirius nodded. "Lily's refusing to let me into the bedroom."

"I take it that you're not as forgiven as you thought." Remus watched as Sirius' face fell. "Want a drink?"

"I've already had half a bottle of scotch, so what's another one?" Sirius' voice came out slightly slurred.

"You apparated drunk?" Remus couldn't believe his friend had been so stupid.

"Yep." Sirius held out his hand. "Drink?"

Remus poured out scotch into two glasses. "So what are you going to do?"

"Right now, I'm planning to get drunker than I already am, and then pass out." Sirius informed his friend. "Can I stay here?"

"Of course you can." Remus passed the glass to Sirius only to cringe as his Dark Mark flared.

Sirius frowned. "Something wrong?"

"Slight back pain, that's all." Remus explained. "Will you excuse me for a while? I've just realized there's something I need to do."

Sirius shrugged. "Just leave me the scotch and I'll be fine."

Several hours later Remus returned, wondering how he was going to explain his absence to his friend. He needn't have worried. Sirius was fast asleep on the sofa, snoring for all he was worth. Shaking his

head Remus dropped a cover over his friend and dimmed the lights before heading to bed.

Harry was waiting for him in his room. "I wondered where you'd gone. I wanted to talk to you about Amicus and Maman."

"The Dark Lord called a meeting." Remus held up his hand as Harry went to speak. "Nothing major; just a general meeting for new inductees. He could have picked a better time though. Sirius was downstairs when my Dark Mark began to burn."

Harry hadn't spotted Sirius when he'd been looking for Remus. "I didn't see him."

"That's because he's stoned and out cold on the sofa in my study." Remus explained.

"I didn't bother going in when I didn't get any response to my knock." Harry frowned. "Is he alright?"

"Lily threw him out of the bedroom." Remus grinned. "I think Sirius will think twice before insulting her again."

Harry giggled. "Was he really drunk?"

"Completely smashed." Remus informed his son. "Remind me to hide the hangover potions in the morning."

"Dad!" Harry couldn't believe Remus would be so cruel.

"It's nothing he hasn't done to me before." Remus yawned. "I think we should both be heading to bed, otherwise we'll be late tomorrow. We can discuss Amicus at the weekend."

Harry headed for the door. "Night Dad."

"Night Harry." Remus sank gratefully onto his bed as Harry closed the door.

Return to School

Harry had been about to board the train when he was nearly knocked over by a small whirlwind. "Slow down. I only saw you last night."

"Hi Harry." Cassie beamed at her brother. "Mum and Dad said I could come and see everyone off." She pulled a face. "Anna and Jamie didn't want me to but Dad shouted at them."

Harry had the feeling that Sirius probably still had a hangover. Cassie smiled up at her brother as he picked up her, wincing as his new kneecap protested somewhat. "Well, I'm glad you're here. Where's Orion?"

"Sitting with Seville Longbottom." Cassie giggled. "I think Orion fancies her."

Harry remembered Orion's comment from the previous night and smiled at Cassie's comment. "Well if he does, he couldn't have picked a nicer girl."

Cassie pulled a face. "Aren't I a nice girl?"

"You know you are, sweetie." Harry put her down.

Cassie looked wistfully at the Express. "I wish I was going."

Harry chuckled her under the chin. "You've only got wait another few years and then it'll be your turn to be standing here with me."

"But you'll be in your last year." Cassie protested. "Do you think Mum and Dad might let me start early, like Anna?"

"I don't know." Harry didn't want to upset his sister by giving her an outright no. "If you started early, then you wouldn't be going to Hogwarts with Scarlett."

Cassie hadn't thought about that. "In that case, I'll wait. I want to be in Ravenclaw with Scarlett, like you and Orion."

"Not Gryffindor?" Harry asked.

Cassie pulled a face. "No. I'd have to be with Jamie then."

The porter called for final boarding. Harry kissed his little sister. "You'd better run along. I've got to get on the train now. Hermione and others will be waiting for me."

Cassie gave Harry one final hug and stepped back to watch her brother board the train. She wasn't alone in watching him. Across the platform, Amicus watched Harry interact with his sister, before getting on board. He was glad to see that Harry hadn't appeared to have suffered any permanent damage from the spells he'd inflicted on him. Normally he'd have just let someone bleed out, but in Harry's case Amicus had had the feeling that despite his oath to the contrary, Remus would have tracked him down and attempted to kill him, even if it had meant his own death. As the train pulled out, Amicus turned and left the platform.

Next Chapter: The Second Task.

Chapter 45: Things take a turn for the worse

January 5th 1995

Georgie and Seville headed back to Gryffindor. Seville was glad that she had a friend she could confide in. "I hated going home at Christmas."

Georgie was surprised. "Why?"

"Mum was never there and Gran was, well, Gran." Seville complained.

"She's not that bad. You could have been me and end up being surprised by your mother telling you she's pregnant and needs to get married." Georgie countered.

"But I thought you were happy that you're going to get a new brother." Seville pushed open the door leading to the stairs.

"I was at first. Then I start wondering if things would change when my brother was born." Georgie looked a little embarrassed. "You know, that Mum and Uncle Grim would favor him."

Having spent a few days with Georgie and her family just before Christmas, Seville shook her head. "I don't see that happening. Harry is adopted, and you'd never guess it by how your Mum and your Uncle Grim treat him."

Georgie sighed. "I'm just being silly, aren't I?"

"I think so." Seville went to walk up the staircase only to slip over on something that had been spilled on the floor.

Georgie bent down to help her friend up, only to pull back. "Move backwards, Sev."

Seville looked down at the floor and, spotting what Georgie had seen, scuttled backwards as quickly as she could. She then looked up. "It's come from up there."

Georgie pulled Sev to her feet and the two of them hurried up the staircase. On the landing, between the two floors, was a girl lying in a pool of blood which, every time the staircase moved, was being allowed to drip down onto the floor below. Seville grasped her friend, and Georgie screamed when she realized who the girl was.

Walking back from seeing Anna, Remus recognized his daughter's scream and ran in the direction of the sound. Just as he reached the staircase where Georgie and Seville were standing, he was joined by Severus and Filius, both of whom had also heard the screaming.

Remus watched as Severus knelt down to check on the girl, only to shake his head. "We're too late."

Hearing that, Georgie and Seville both burst into tears. Remus put an arm around each girl. "Let's go to the hospital wing." The girls let Remus lead them off.

By now teachers and students alike were making their way to the staircase. Filius turned round. "Students will return immediately to their houses." When the few students who had already reached the area didn't move, Filius surprised them with his sharp tone. "I said NOW."

As the students filtered away, the other teachers came to stand by Severus. Minerva gasped when she recognized one of her students. "Is she...?"

Severus nodded. "I'm afraid she is."

Albus took charge. "Severus, can you take Miss Bailey's body to a private room off the hospital wing?"

Minerva shook her head. "She's one of mine. I'll take her." Aurora Sinistra patted her friend and colleague on the arm. "I'll come with you, Minerva."

Severus stood aside as Minerva cast Mobilicorpus, and then followed her friend and former student down the stairs and up the corridor towards the hospital wing.

Albus turned to the other teachers. "I think Severus and Filius should stay. Argus, if you'd also be so good as to stay. The rest of you may as well get back to whatever it is you were doing." Albus looked up. "What do you think happened?"

Severus made his way up the stairs. "There's ink on the top of the stairs up here."

Albus sighed. "It looks as though someone must have spilled the ink, and Miss Bailey slipped and fell when she stepped into."

Filius agreed. "Poor girl. Just a simple misstep and it's all over."

Albus turned to the two men. "I need to go and inform Miss Bailey's parents." He then turned to Argus Filch. "Argus, would you please clean up the blood and the ink? I don't want any more accidents."

The caretaker set off to fetch his bucket and mop.

Severus watched as Albus left before turning to Filius. "Do you think it was just a simple accident?"

Filius nodded. "I do. It's not like the girl had any enemies as far as I know. Minerva might have more idea though."

The two men headed for the hospital wing.

Minerva had placed Miranda's body in a side room where Madam Pomfrey had promptly cleaned her up. Minerva looked up as Severus and Filius came into the room. "I take it Dumbledore's gone to tell her parents."

Severus nodded. "He has. We think it was just a simple accident. I found ink at the top of the staircase from which she must have been coming down. I just wanted to check first though whether she had anyone who might want to hurt her."

Minerva shook her head. "After she stopped seeing Potter, she kept pretty much to herself. She had one or two close friends, such as Colin Creevey, and overall, I'd say she was well liked."

"I'd definitely say that it was just an accident then." Filius was satisfied that no foul play had been involved. "I don't think I'm needed here anymore."

"Would you like me to stay?" Severus offered.

Minerva shook her head. "I can deal with things from here, but thanks Severus."

The two men left the room and headed over to where Georgie and Seville had both been given calming potions and large mugs of hot chocolate. Georgie lifted a tearstained face up to look at Severus. "What happened, Professor?"

"It was a simple accident. Someone had spilt ink on the staircase, and Miss Bailey must have stepped into it, causing her to slip and fall." Severus kept his voice low and reassuring.

Remus let out a sigh of relief. "I'm relieved to hear that we don't have some monster roaming around the school again."

Filius smiled in spite of the situation. "I think we can safely rule that out. I'll leave you to escort the girls back, Remus."

Severus and Filius left Remus and the two girls and headed out of the hospital wing.

January 13th 1995

Albus smiled as Frisk, one his most trusted house-elves, handed him the silky garment. "That will be all. Make sure you speak to no-one of this."

"No, Master Albus." Frisk bowed low and promptly disappeared.

Albus had sent Frisk to search for the cloak after Albus had spotted a pair of feet sticking out from what was obviously an invisibility cloak, walking up a corridor one night during his rounds. Not wanting to alert Jamie to the fact that he was there, Albus had immediately left and made his way back to his office.

Now Albus ran his hand reverently over the cloak. He knew that Jamie would be upset to find it missing but there was no way he would ever link it to him. Going over to his trunk, Albus placed the cloak carefully inside.

January 15th 1995

Jamie stormed into the library where he found Harry and Hermione sitting together. "I want a word with you right now, Lupin."

Harry followed Jamie into the stacks. "Now what have I done?"

"Why did you take the cloak back? You promised I could keep it until we left school." Jamie's face was ugly as he bit out his accusation at Harry.

Harry was confused. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"The cloak; it's gone. The only other people who know it's here are Dad and Ron, and I know none of them would have taken it. So it has to be you." Jamie prodded Harry in the chest as he spoke.

Harry pushed back at his brother. "I promised you could keep the cloak, and I meant it. I have no idea who has taken it. But I do know that it's not me. Tell me, how do you think I got into Gryffindor?"

Jamie hadn't thought of that. "I don't know, but I know you must have."

Harry was now starting to get irritated at Jamie's accusations. "Potter, I don't have the bloody cloak."

Jamie glared at Harry. "Well, if you don't, then who does?"

"I have no idea." Harry was now perplexed. "Why would someone steal the cloak?"

"Because it's very rare and very valuable of course." Jamie pointed out. "Perhaps Dean took it. His family isn't very well off."

"You know very well that Dean wouldn't take the cloak." Harry was exasperated that Jamie would think that Dean would do such a thing. Even though Harry now had little to do with the Gryffindor, he would have still trusted him with the cloak. "And besides, you said that no-one except for Ron and Sirius knows you have it here, and of course, me."

"I suppose I'd better report it missing then, unless there's something you want to tell me, Lupin." Jamie was still convinced that Harry had somehow taken it.

"I haven't, Potter, so I think you'd better report it missing." Harry pushed by his brother. "If that's all, I'd really like to get back to my schoolwork."

Jamie sneered. "Lupin, only you and Snape would be doing schoolwork on a Sunday; most people like to try and relax."

"Perhaps 'most people' would have better test scores if they applied themselves more often instead of trying to relax." Harry then walked off, leaving Jamie standing there alone.

February 1st 1995

Harry frowned as an envelope suddenly appeared in front of him. Hermione glanced across as she heard a slight popping sound. "What's that?"

"I don't know. It just appeared." Harry gingerly pushed at the envelope with his quill. "It's sealed with a Ministry seal on the back."

"I think it's probably safe. I doubt very much whether Amicus would hide behind a Ministry seal; he certainly didn't at New Year."

Hermione looked at the envelope with interest. "If you're worried, get your Dad to check it first."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not. It has to be something to do with the Tournament. Dumbledore did announce that we'd be receiving something today." Taking a deep breath, Harry opened the envelope but still took care not to touch the card inside, which he dropped out onto the table.

Hermione looked across. "It's a riddle, and a bad one at that."

"Definitely not Amicus then. I couldn't see him writing drivel like this." Harry picked up the card.

"Walk into the Forest Forbidden

Come deep inside where I am hidden

To find me you must face your fear

What it is, is not yet clear

After that pass through the silk

And from the darkness claim the milk."

Hermione giggled. "I bet some idiot from the Ministry wrote it." She wasn't wrong. Percy Prewett, Barty Crouch's assistant, had come up with the riddle.

Harry easily deciphered most of the riddle. "I'm going into the Forest when it's dark, facing a boggart, and then some sort of spider I presume. The only part that I don't know the answer to is the milk; that could be anything."

"I've got no idea either." Hermione shrugged. "I think the most difficult part has to be going into the Forest at night."

“Why couldn’t they have made it during the day?” Harry shuddered at the thought of going into the Forest during the night. He checked his calendar. “At least the full moon isn’t until the fifteenth.”

“Which is probably why they scheduled the task for Valentine’s Day.” Hermione pointed out. “Hopefully there will be plenty of moonlight to brighten up the woods.”

“I wonder if Dad fancies a walk in the Forest that night.” Harry knew that was wishful thinking.

“You know as well as I do that teachers won’t be allowed into the Forest.” Hermione put down her own quill and closed her books, no longer able to concentrate on her work. “I think I’m going to call it a night. It’s almost curfew anyway.”

“Do you want me to walk you back?” Harry closed his own books and placed them into his bag.

“I’ll be fine.” Hermione got up and stretched.

Harry smiled up at his girlfriend, before standing up as well. “How about a goodnight kiss then?”

“Harry!” Hermione looked anxiously around the library.

“Stop worrying. There’s no-one here but us and Madam Pince, and she’s in her office.” Harry grabbed Hermione’s hand. “Come here.”

The two of them disappeared into the stacks. Ever since they’d returned to school, the two of them had been sneaking moments together whenever they could.

Harry had been about to kiss Hermione for the third time when a cough interrupted the pair. “Well, well, what do we have here?”

Hermione scowled. “What’s it got to do with you, Prewett?”

Ginny leant casually against a bookcase. “Hermione Snape. Everyone thought you were such a good girl, and here you are

sneaking around with Lupin.” Ginny laughed. “I think you might have some spirit after all.”

Hermione sighed. “What do you want?”

“I’ll let you know.” With that, Ginny disappeared out of the stacks.

“Damn.” Harry was annoyed at himself. “I should have checked more carefully.”

“It doesn’t matter.” Hermione made her way back to the desk to pick up her stuff. “I’ll just have to do something for her.”

“And you can count on her to keep quiet?” Harry was surprised at how trusting Hermione was being.

“There’s an unwritten rule in Slytherin about keeping things in-house.” Hermione explained. “I know plenty about our young friend’s fiancé but I haven’t made it public knowledge. I made Prewett back off from harassing some of the younger students to keep that knowledge private.”

Harry was intrigued. “Don’t tell me, you can’t tell me.”

“I’m afraid not.” Hermione looked regretfully at Harry. “It wouldn’t be right. Prewett will do the same for us, or at least she’d better.”

Harry wasn’t entirely happy about the situation. “I suppose I’ll just have to go along with it.” Harry shook his head frustratedly. “I really should have checked properly.”

Hermione squeezed his arm. “Don’t worry about it. Goodnight Harry.”

“Goodnight.” Harry made his way out of the library and up to Ravenclaw, still annoyed that he hadn’t taken more care.

February 11th 1995

Severus smirked as he watched Jamie Potter scrub the very last cauldron out by hand. It had been worth staying up until almost

midnight for the pleasure of seeing the brat being taken down a peg or two.

Jamie scowled as he rinsed off the last cauldron. When he had finally gotten up the courage to report that his cloak had gone missing, Professor McGonagall had immediately berated him for bringing such a valuable object into school, and for leaving it so long to report it missing. Jamie had stupidly defended his actions and told her that he thought that perhaps Harry had taken it and he was hoping that he'd eventually return it. Professor McGonagall had immediately slapped him with a detention with her for accusing Harry without evidence before ordering a search of the school. No trace of the cloak had turned up.

Harry hadn't been very happy when Jamie had told him the news, mostly because the cloak was a family heirloom than for any other reason. Jamie's day had only gotten worse when McGonagall had informed him that she couldn't take him for detention, and that Professor Snape would be overseeing it instead.

Jamie looked up. "That's the last one, Sir."

Just then a knock sounded on the door and Filius put his head around. "Severus, you're still up. I was hoping to catch you before you went to bed."

"You may go, Potter." Severus now just wanted Jamie out of the room.

Jamie didn't need telling twice, and hurried off as quickly as he could back to Gryffindor.

Filius entered the room, and locked the door behind him. "I've got news of my brother."

February 12th 1995

Harry was waiting at the entrance to the school for Hermione to join him to go to Hogsmeade when Auri came dashing up. "I've got a message for you."

Harry lifted one eyebrow. "And?"

"If you're going to be like that, then I won't tell you." Auri made to turn away.

"Sorry, Auri." Harry could feel how sweaty his palms were. Even though he and Hermione had been sneaking kisses together, he was suddenly very nervous as this was to be their first 'real' date. "I'm just a little on edge at the moment."

"Because of the Tournament?" Auri didn't even consider that Harry was nervous about Hermione. "Don't worry, you'll do great. You're certainly better than that idiot Potter."

Harry sighed. "Auri, please tell me; what's the message?"

"Oh, yes. Hermione can't make it. She's in the hospital wing. She was helping Prewett with a potion when it exploded." Auri watched as Harry's face dropped. "Madam Pomfrey said she'll be alright."

Harry thanked his sister before dashing off towards the hospital ward. When he got there he pushed open the doors to find Hermione lying on a bed, salve covering her face, neck and arms. "Hermione, Auri told me you'd been hurt."

Severus came out of Madam Pomfrey's room. "She can't speak right now, Harry. Her throat was damaged by the fumes from the potion."

"What was she making?" Harry was horrified at the state of his girlfriend.

"Veritaserum." Severus frowned. "It's why she was making it that puzzles me."

Harry watched as Madam Pomfrey ran her wand over Hermione before putting her to sleep. "How long will she be asleep for?"

"A couple of hours; her throat is pretty painful right now." Severus sighed. "She must have picked up a wrong ingredient; Veritaserum usually isn't this volatile."

Harry frowned. "Can we talk privately?"

Severus immediately led Harry across the ward and invoked a privacy bubble. "You know what happened?"

"I wasn't there but I have a good idea." Harry then explained about Ginny catching the two of them kissing in the library. "Hermione said that Prewett would want something in return. I've got a feeling that the Veritaserum was it."

"It still doesn't explain why the potion exploded." Severus pointed out.

"Hermione had information on Zabini; I don't know what though. She wouldn't tell me. She used it to blackmail Prewett into leaving the younger students alone." Harry swallowed hard. "I don't like to accuse anyone of something so bad, but I've got a horrible feeling that Prewett used the opportunity to try and make sure that Hermione wouldn't tell anyone anything about Zabini."

Severus was troubled by Harry's suspicions. "Unfortunately I can't prove that."

"I know. I'm not saying that she did do anything wrong but I just wanted to let you know what I believe might be the case." Harry hoped he'd done the right thing.

"I'm glad you told me." Severus dropped the bubble. "Shouldn't you be in Hogsmeade?"

"I was going with Hermione." Harry explained. "But Auri told me she'd been hurt. I'm probably just going to relax instead and catch up on some reading."

Severus nodded. "Hermione should be ready for visitors later this evening, if you want to come back then."

"Thanks, Sir." Harry gave Hermione one last fleeting glance before leaving the infirmary.

Later that evening

Harry walked into the hospital wing to find Hermione sitting up and sipping water out of a glass. He hurried over to her bed. "How are you feeling?"

"Not great." Hermione's voice was very croaky. "Was it you who told Papa about Prewett?"

"Yes." Harry couldn't see any reason to deny it. "Auri told me you'd been helping Prewett with a potion."

"She'd asked for one dose of Veritaserum as a pay-off for keeping quiet about us." Hermione croaked. "I couldn't see any reason not to make it as it wasn't anything that would really hurt anyone. When I poured what I thought was distilled water into the cauldron, everything exploded."

Harry refilled Hermione's glass for her. "I think Prewett tried to kill you."

"Don't be daft." Hermione didn't like Ginny but she also didn't think her capable of murder. "I must have accidentally picked up the wrong container."

Harry didn't agree, but decided to let the matter rest. "You're right. I'm just worried, that's all."

Hermione was relieved at Harry's response. "So how was Hogsmeade?"

"I wouldn't know. I didn't go. Instead I went and researched the runes problem we were assigned on Friday." Harry pulled out several sheaves of paper. "This is a copy of my notes. I'm a little confused about..." With that the two fell into a discussion about the allocated homework, all thoughts of Ginny and her possible motives forgotten.

February 14th 1995

Harry had been excused from lessons for the last part of the day in order to get ready for the second task. After lacing up his boots, he made his way down to the entrance of the Great Hall as instructed. The other three Champions were already there.

Barty Crouch smiled at the Champions. "If you'd all please come with me. Everything is ready for you."

They all followed Crouch down to the quidditch pitch where everyone in the school were once again seated. "This is where you'll return to when you've completed your task."

Crouch then cast 'sonorous' and turned to face the crowd. "The four Champions will enter the Forest one by one. Mr. Lupin will go at the first bell, then Mr. Potter, Miss Delacour and finally, Mr. Krum. Once they've retrieved what it is they are looking for, they will return here. Points will be awarded dependent upon how quickly they return, and on whether they return with their assignment."

He then cancelled the sonorous spell. "If any of you run into trouble, shoot red sparks into the air and someone will bring you back to safety."

The four children looked nervously at each other and then at the dark outline of the Forest. None of them were particularly looking forward to going inside. As the first bell sounded, Harry set off, his path clearly delineated with a Ravenclaw insignia at the start. Taking a deep breath he plunged into the Forest.

In the stands Hermione watched nervously as Harry disappeared from view. "Do you think he'll be alright?"

Remus nodded. "I'm actually going to go down and wait just inside the Forest. If anything goes wrong, I'm going to go in after Harry. The other three champions also have people who will be doing the same for them."

"I wish Harry's visions had been more helpful." Hermione hadn't been happy when Harry had told her that the two tasks he'd learnt the

other Harry had experienced had been totally different to the ones he was now undergoing.

“So do I, but we know that the timeline doesn’t always work out that way.” Remus stood up. “I’ll see you later.”

Remus slipped out of the box and disappeared into the night, leaving Hermione to worry alone.

Out in the Forest, Harry had lit his wand for extra illumination. He was happy that there were no clouds that evening allowing the moon to shine down and help light the way. He’d been walking for a few minutes when he suddenly started to feel cold. Guessing that this must be his greatest fear, Harry immediately called out ‘Riddikulus’, only for nothing to happen and for the cold to begin to intensify. Trying to keep calm, Harry spotted a Dementor on the path ahead. He was alarmed to see that it was rapidly getting closer. Knowing that if he delayed acting for too much longer, he’d probably pass out, Harry quickly yelled out. “Expecto Patronum.” A large glowing wolf shot out of the end of his wand and charged the Dementor. The wolf continued to harass its prey until the Dementor finally fled.

Harry collapsed to his knees shaking. From the riddle, he’d thought that it was going to be a Boggart he’d be facing, not a real Dementor. He reached inside his pocket and pulled out the bar of chocolate that Hermione had insisted he take, just in case the Boggart Harry believed to be awaiting him assumed the form of a Dementor. Harry was now grateful for his girlfriend’s foresight as he bit into the chocolate, feeling warmth drive away the effects of the Dementor’s proximity. Harry was just thankful that he hadn’t slipped into unconsciousness.

Up above Harry, Amicus watched silently. He too had been glad of the almost full moon; it had enabled him to easily watch what was going on below him. Already aware of the tasks facing the Champions, it hadn’t been difficult to discover Harry’s greatest fear; Amicus had simply grabbed Dudley a few days earlier in Hogsmeade, used Legilimency on him, and finally obliviated him before letting him go. Just before the task began, Amicus had dispatched the Boggart; his Master had provided the real Dementor. Amicus had made sure to

keep well away from the Dementor even though it had been ordered not to attack him.

Down below, Harry got up and continued up the path only for a large shape to block his way. Harry gulped at its size.

“Who goes there?” The spider’s voice was very deep and resonating, startling Harry; he hadn’t expected the spider to be able to speak at all.

“Harry Lupin.” Harry didn’t know what else to say.

“Did Hagrid send you for my dinner?” The spider asked.

Harry wasn’t surprised to discover that the spider knew Hagrid. “Err, no. I don’t mean you any harm; I just need to get past you.”

“I’m sorry little man but I need food.” The spider started to advance on Harry.

Harry went to move backwards and was glad he glanced over his shoulder before he did so, for behind him, covering the path, was a huge web. Harry stopped as the spider advanced on him. Raising his wand, he let the spell that Hermione had found for him fly at the spider. “Arania Exumai”. The spider flew backwards but still blocked his path. Harry had to use the spell again and again, until finally the spider scuttled off into the darkness. Suddenly a girl’s scream rent the air and red sparks appeared high in the sky. Harry guessed that Fleur Delacour had run into trouble.

Not able to do anything to help her, Harry continued on his way. Up ahead he could see that the pathway opened up into a clearing. He had just about been about to step into it when another large shadow blocked his path. Harry frowned; the riddle hadn’t indicated that there would be any other obstacles.

The obstacle turned out to be a centaur, its bow drawn. “How dare you invade what is rightfully ours, wizard.”

Harry was a little taken aback at the centaur's ferocity. He knew from his Dad that centaurs were usually private but extremely polite creatures. Not really sure what to do, Harry holstered his wand, and bowed his head. "Good evening, Sir."

The centaur inclined his head but kept his bow aimed at Harry. "Good evening."

Harry decided that continuing to be polite was definitely his best option. "I'm sorry if I'm intruding but I'm part of the Triwizard Tournament. I've only entered the Forest as part of my challenge."

"What is your name?" The centaur asked, still not lowering the bow.

"Harry Lupin, Sir." Harry responded, resisting the impulse to unholster his wand.

The centaur finally lowered his bow. "You are the werewolf's son?"

Harry presumed he meant Remus and nodded. "I am."

Suddenly Harry heard a hissing voice close to the ground. Not thinking, he pulled out his wand. The centaur, who still hadn't introduced himself, raised his bow once more, only to lower it again when Harry called out 'Lumos'. Close to the centaur's rear hooves, lay a small but deadly Venenifer snake which was hissing alarmingly at the centaur. Harry hissed out to it. "We mean you no harm."

The snake was surprised to hear Harry speaking to it. "The cloven one endangers my nestlings. He must move away or I will strike."

Harry turned to the centaur. "You are very close to the snake's nest; she has babies and is afraid you will step on them."

The centaur looked down at the snake and walked towards Harry. The snake immediately lowered its head and slithered off into the undergrowth. The centaur looked down at Harry. "You are the snake speaker?"

“I’m not the only one. My friend Hermione can also talk to snakes.” Harry wasn’t sure if the centaur had got the right person, as only a few people were aware of his ability.

“The stars tell of a boy, a snake speaker, who will either lead us to great destruction or to great victory.” The centaur stared at Harry. “I believe this boy to be you.”

Harry shook his head. “I’m no leader.”

“Think what you will.” The centaur unstrung his bow, and started to turn away. Before he left, he addressed Harry once more. “I am Riven. Perhaps we will meet again, Harry Lupin.”

“I hope so.” Harry answered politely. “Good evening, Riven.”

“Good evening, Harry Lupin.” With that the centaur galloped off, leaving Harry alone.

Unsure of how much time had gone past since he’d left the quidditch pitch, Harry hurried into the clearing. In the center, on a lit stand, was a small phial filled with a white, cloudy liquid. Harry realized that this must be the milk. Walking over to the stand, Harry uncorked the vial. As he did so, the acrid smell of latex reached his nostrils, and Harry immediately re-corked it. He was pretty sure that he now knew what it was; Euphorbia. He was glad he hadn’t inhaled it; he was more than aware of the caustic and poisonous nature of the milk sap. Not wishing for any of it to come into contact with his skin, Harry used his wand to render the container unbreakable. Only then did he slip it into his pocket.

Realizing that he could now return, Harry went to turn around, only to find himself immobilized. Amicus dropped the invisibility spell which had hidden him from view. “Hello, Harry.”

Harry struggled hard to try and free himself from the spell but was unable to move at all. Amicus laughed. “I shouldn’t bother. You’re not going to free yourself unless I allow it.”

Helpless, Harry could do little but watch as Amicus took his wand from him before releasing him from the spell. "What do you want?"

"That's not very polite." Amicus berated the boy. "You had perfectly good manners when you were addressing the centaur."

"He was deserving of my respect, which is more than I can say for you." Harry knew he shouldn't really bait the Death Eater but without his wand, his words were the only weapons he had.

Amicus put a hand to his heart. "You wound me."

Harry glowered at Amicus' mockery. "I doubt that very much."

"As much as I'd like to stay here and banter with you, I think it's time we took a little trip." Amicus watched as Harry backed up. "Where do you think you're going? It's not as if you're going to get far without your wand."

Harry still made to move into the Forest only stopping when a strange grunting noise coming from his left forced him to step back into the clearing.

Amicus laughed. "I told you wouldn't get far without your wand. It's your choice, Harry, you can either take your chances with whatever lies out there, or you can come with me."

Harry knew that he probably wouldn't make it safely out of the forest without his wand especially if, as he suspected, Amicus had arranged for something to lie in wait for him. Swearing under his breath, Harry stood still as Amicus came towards him.

Amicus slipped his arm around Harry's waist. "I suggest you keep very still. I don't want to lose any of you when we apparate."

Harry had little choice but to do as he was told. Once the squeezing sensation had finished, Harry found himself standing in a very large and opulent room. "Where are we?"

“Villa Laurifer, the Dark Lord’s home. These are my quarters.” Amicus informed him. “If you’ll excuse me, I need to change.”

Harry watched as Amicus headed through one of the three doors that lined the far wall of the room, before shutting it behind him. Harry immediately tried one of the two doors that Amicus hadn’t gone through. A large and luxurious bathroom met his eyes; Harry couldn’t help but think that being the Dark Lord’s confidante certainly had its perks. Quickly closing the door, Harry headed towards the final door, only for Amicus to open his door and call out. “You can go through that door if you want to, but I can guarantee you won’t get far. While you remain in this room, you are under my protection. Once you leave, you’re on your own.”

Harry’s hand hovered hesitantly above the door handle. Something in Amicus’ voice convinced him that the man was actually telling the truth. Reluctantly he moved away from the door.

“A wise decision.” Amicus stepped back into the room, having changed his clothes. Now he was wearing only a three quarter mask but even though Harry could see the lower features of his face, they appeared blurred. Amicus passed Harry his wand back. “I shouldn’t attempt to use that if I was you. This time I might not be so generous in my actions when you’re bleeding to death.”

Not willing to take a chance, Harry holstered his wand. “What is it you want with me?”

“Would you like something to drink?” Amicus offered, ignoring Harry’s question.

Not trusting the Death Eater, Harry refused. “No thank you.”

Amicus ignored Harry’s refusal and picked up two glasses from a table, filling one of them with pumpkin juice before offering it to him. “It’s only juice.”

Harry took the glass and sniffed it suspiciously before putting it down, making Amicus laugh. “You’re not very trusting, are you?”

“What do you expect?” Harry couldn’t believe that Amicus really expected him to drink something that he had no idea of what it contained.

“You’re right of course.” Amicus poured himself a glass of firewhiskey. “Let’s make things a little more comfortable. I swear on my magic that you will leave this room unharmed tonight unless you attack me first.” Amicus felt the oath he’d made settle over him.

Harry couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “Why would you do that?”

“As I said, I want you to feel comfortable.” Amicus indicated that Harry should sit down. “You must be wondering why I took the trouble to bring you here when I could have just killed you in the Forest.”

“A little.” The thought had crossed Harry’s mind.

“I have a proposition for you.” Amicus took a large mouthful of his firewhiskey before smiling smugly at Harry.

“What is it?” Harry suddenly felt very apprehensive.

““I’m in need of a protégé.” Amicus waited for Harry’s reaction.

Harry was incredulous. “You can’t really mean me.”

“But I do.” Amicus informed him, his voice becoming sharper.

“And if I refuse?” Harry could feel his stomach tightening with nerves.

“Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be an orphan without any family or friends?” Amicus left Harry to draw his own conclusions from his statement.

Harry felt the blood drain from his face. “So if I say no, you’re going to kill my friends and family?”

Amicus stood up and picked up a crystal globe that was resting on a shelf. “I didn’t say I was going to kill anyone.”

Knowing that Amicus couldn't harm him, Harry snorted loudly. "You didn't have to."

Amicus walked over to where Harry was sitting and dropped to one knee, before holding the globe up in front of him. "Take a good look inside."

Curiosity getting the better of him, Harry did as Amicus instructed. "It's just a dog."

Amicus smiled at him. "Look closer, Harry; what else do you see?"

Harry frowned and stared harder. "Stars and a full moon."

Amicus grinned as Harry's face turned red with anger. "I see you understand now."

Harry scowled at Amicus. "You bastard."

"Name calling isn't polite, Harry. I'll be reminding you of that the next time we meet." Amicus passed the globe to Harry. "As I said, I won't be the one to kill everyone you know or care about."

Harry felt sick as he turned the globe over in his hand. "You don't really leave me much choice do you?"

Amicus smirked. "I thought you'd see it my way. The globe belongs on the top shelf."

Harry didn't want to look at it any longer and got up to replace it.

Amicus poured out a second firewhiskey as a now white-faced Harry returned to his seat. "This is for you. It's supposed to be good for shock."

"I don't want it." Harry pushed the glass back towards Amicus.

"Just drink it." Amicus growled at him. "Or I can add it to the list of things I'll be punishing you for the next time we meet."

Harry reluctantly took the glass and took a sip, spluttering when the rawness of the whiskey made him choke.

Amicus laughed at Harry's distress. "You'll get used to it."

Suddenly the door Harry had been intending to go through when he first arrived opened, and Harry had to bite his lip in pain as Voldemort walked in and up to him. "So we meet again, Harry Lupin."

"My Lord." Amicus bowed before snapping an order out to Harry. "Get up, Harry."

Voldemort wasn't particularly bothered when Harry didn't respond; he hadn't really expected the boy to imitate Amicus' show of respect. He turned to address Amicus. "Did everything go to plan?"

"It did." Amicus informed him. "That is why Harry here, is listening to what I have to offer him."

"Good. Your guest should be arriving shortly." After speaking to Amicus, Voldemort turned to face Harry again. Despite the boy's show of defiance, Voldemort guessed that Harry was afraid, as he could see sweat was running down Harry's forehead. "So Harry, have you decided to accept Amicus' generous offer?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders, trying to disguise the tremors of pain that were now wracking his body as Voldemort came closer than he'd ever been before. "He's made it hard for me to refuse."

Amicus grinned. "A little persuasion can go a long way."

"I expect it can." Voldemort headed back towards the door. "I'll leave you two to get on with your, err, negotiations."

Amicus smirked and bowed again. "My Lord."

After the door had shut, Amicus turned to face Harry. "The next time our Master comes into the room, you will show him some courtesy and bow."

Harry shook his head. "I don't think so."

Amicus just laughed. "Brave words but we'll see." He then sat back down. "As you already know, there's a bathroom through that door if you want to freshen up." Amicus too had spotted the sweat running down Harry's forehead, and like Voldemort, had simply presumed Harry was afraid.

Wanting to escape from under Amicus' gaze, Harry headed into the room and closed the door behind him. Heading for the sink, he splashed cold water on his face, before sitting down on the side of the massive bath tub. He couldn't believe the mess he was in. He also couldn't understand why Amicus had picked him. Standing up, he made sure the door was locked before attempting to portkey out. Nothing happened. Desperately he tried to apparate, but to no avail. Swearing, he made use of the facilities before returning to Amicus' room.

As he made his way back into the sitting room, Harry realized that the guest Voldemort had mentioned must have arrived, as there was now a cloaked man sitting at the table with his back to Harry. Amicus was wearing a smile that filled Harry with a sense of a dread.

Amicus grinned maliciously at his guest. "Praeses, I'd like to introduce you to my protégé."

After swinging round to see who had come out of the bathroom, Remus went white. "You can't be serious."

Amicus moved to stand next to Harry and put a fatherly hand on Harry's shoulder. "Oh but I am. Harry's already agreed to it, haven't you Harry?"

Harry swallowed hard and nodded. "You didn't give me a lot of choice in the matter."

"Why pick him?" Remus could hear his voice shaking.

“Because he’s not only powerful, but he’s skilled as well.” Amicus pointed out. “There aren’t too many fourteen year olds who can cast a fully formed patronus and master the animagus transformation.”

Harry felt sick. Because he’d wanted to defend himself, he’d opened himself up to something much worse. “It hardly means I’m something special.”

“I beg to differ.” Amicus picked up his glass and refilled it. “I also know you’re capable of apparition, speak parseltongue and that you’re a fair dueler.”

“How do you know I can apparate?” Harry had only practiced with Remus and Sirius present.

“Because you just attempted it.” Amicus smiled arrogantly at Harry. “Why else do you think I let you go into the bathroom? I simply wanted to see what you would do.”

Harry wanted to hit Amicus. “Bastard.”

“Twice in one night, Harry. The name calling’s getting a little repetitive.” Amicus pushed a second glass of firewhiskey at Harry, only for Remus to put his hand in the way.

“He’s a little too young to drink firewhiskey.” Remus knew he was probably going to be punished for interfering but he didn’t care.

“You’re too late, Lupin. He’s already tried it.” Amicus picked up the glass and passed it to Harry, who begrudgingly took it off him, before sitting down.

Remus couldn’t look at Harry. “Is this because of me?”

Amicus shook his head. “It helps that you can show him the ropes, but Harry’s talents are what caught my eye, and not your standing with the Dark Lord.”

“There must be plenty of Death Eaters who’d jump at the chance to serve as your protégé.” Harry finally rejoined the conversation, the sip

of firewhiskey he'd taken helping his stomach to relax and bolstering his nerves.

"You're probably right but I haven't seen anyone worthy of my time." Amicus informed Harry. "You on the other hand..."

"When?" Remus interrupted.

"He has until his fifteenth birthday." Amicus stood up. "On that evening, I expect you to bring him here to be initiated. You're going to be his sponsor."

At the word 'sponsor' Harry's stomach began to revolt again. Remus also stood up. "If that's everything, may we take our leave now?"

Amicus nodded. "It is. But before you both go, I've got something for Harry."

Harry recoiled as Amicus held out a plain white mask. "I'm afraid I can't offer to take you back myself, so I suggest you put this on to walk out of here. I'd hate for anything to happen to you on your way out."

"But you said I'd be safe." Harry protested, ignoring the mask.

"While you are in these rooms you are but as I said earlier, out there is a different story. Now, I have things to do, so you'll either leave through that door of your own free will or I'll ask someone to escort you out." Amicus sounded as though he was running out of patience.

Remus took the mask from Amicus. "Harry, please put this on."

Amicus watched as Remus passed the mask to Harry before replacing his own mask. "Once you leave these rooms, your identity is not to be revealed, no matter what happens. Do I make myself clear?"

"Crystal." Trying to hide his revulsion, Harry slipped the mask on.

Amicus whispered something, and Harry watched as the man's mask once more became a solid object covering the entirety of his face. Amicus turned to Remus. "I'm sure you'll ensure that my protégé makes it safely out of here."

Remus resisted the temptation to make a sarcastic remark, and simply inclined his head. "Of course. Harry, let's go."

Harry headed towards the door, only for Amicus to call out to him. "Don't forget what will happen if you don't appear on your birthday, Harry."

"I'll do my best not to." Harry deliberately made his tone sarcastic, but only succeeded in making Amicus laugh.

Amicus couldn't resist one final retort. "Happy Valentine's Day, Harry."

Harry ignored him and walked out of the room, only to come to an abrupt halt. He had no idea where to go.

"Follow me and don't talk to anyone no matter what happens." Remus instructed Harry, his voice sounding curt. "If I tell you to do something, don't argue, just do it."

Harry quietly followed Remus. Notwithstanding his situation, Harry was interested in his surroundings as he followed Remus down several flights of stairs and into a large ballroom. As they entered the room, Harry felt his heart jump. He'd never seen so many Death Eaters before in one place. Remembering Remus' words, he kept his eyes on his Dad and made sure he kept up with him.

Remus had almost reached the other side of the room, when a man wearing a mask with a snake and skull etched on it, stepped out in front of him. "So, who do you have with you, Praeses?"

Harry guessed from the markings on the mask that it probably belonged to someone who ranked higher than his father, and he was suddenly more frightened than he'd been all night. There was

something about the man's insolent tone that unnerved him more than Amicus had.

"No-one you need to know about, Angelus." Remus had hoped that their passage would go relatively unnoticed.

Angelus walked around Remus and stared at Harry who kept his head down. "You're a little short for a Death Eater, aren't you?"

Harry shrugged and said nothing.

"Not exactly talkative are you?" Angelus goaded Harry.

"There's not much to say." Harry responded.

"Take off your mask." Angelus ordered.

Remembering what Amicus had said to him, Harry refused. "No."

Interested in what was happening, the other Death Eaters in the room stopped what they were doing and turned their attention to the exchange taking place at the rear of the room. Occupied by the spat taking place, no-one noticed as Voldemort and Amicus entered the room together from a side door.

Remus stepped in front of Harry as Angelus pulled out his wand. "I suggest you back off, Angelus."

"Get out of my way, Praeses." Angelus ordered.

"No, the boy's my problem to deal with." Remus grabbed Harry by his arm and roughly pushed him towards a set of double doors. "Get out of my sight, boy. Go to the Square and wait for me there." Remus hoped Harry would understand where he meant.

Angelus frowned behind his mask. "Stay where you are boy."

Harry ignored him and kept walking, nervous sweat running down his back.

Remus once again moved into Angelus' line of sight, just as he raised his wand. "I said he's mine to deal with."

"You forget yourself, Praeses." Bored and in need of a distraction, when Angelus had spotted Remus and one of the smallest Death Eater's he'd ever seen enter the room, he'd decided to use the opportunity to try and have a little fun at the obviously new Death Eater's expense. Angelus hadn't expected Remus to defend the Death Eater so vehemently.

Remus finally acquiesced as he heard the crack of apparition from the next room. "Forgive me."

"I don't think so." Angelus grinned to himself. He'd hated Remus for a very long time, but up until now, Remus had never given him any opportunity to discipline him. Angelus decided to capitalize on that opportunity. "Crucio."

Remus hit the floor screaming.

Angelus kept the spell up as he bent down and whispered to him. "I'm going to kill you, werewolf, but first I'm going to make you watch while I enjoy what your woman has to offer."

Remus gasped as Angelus dropped the spell. "I don't have a woman."

"I know differently, Praeses." Angelus had seen Remus looking cozy with one of the female professors during a Hogsmeade visit. "Been seeing any hot professors lately?"

Remus knew immediately that Angelus meant Anna. There was no way he was letting Angelus near her; he was more than aware of his violent sexual tastes. "Keep away from her." Remus was also aware that if Dae found out, he'd risk everything to avenge his fiancée.

"A pretty lady like that shouldn't walk around alone; she's just asking for trouble." Angelus had followed Anna through Hogsmeade when she'd left Remus, intending to have a little fun with her. Only the fact

that Minerva McGonagall had joined her had stopped him. Angelus smirked before casting his second unforgiveable. "Imperio."

Remus was easily able to shake off the Imperius curse; something Angelus wasn't aware of.

"Get up." Angelus ordered.

Remus pretended to do as he was told.

"Now take off your mask. I'm sure everyone here would like to see who you really are." Angelus ordered.

Remus made as if to take off his mask, only to reach out and grab Angelus by the throat instead. "You know very well I can't do that."

Angelus dropped his wand, needing both hands to try and make Remus release his grip on his throat.

"Not so much fun now, is it?" Angry at Angelus for threatening Anna, Remus backed the Death Eater up against the wall before taking his turn to whisper to the Death. "Let me make this very clear to you. You so much as lay a finger on anyone I know, and I'll be introducing you to my furry little problem. Do you understand what I'm saying?"

Angelus struggled to nod. Remus dropped him. "Keep away from me in future, Angelus."

Remus had been about to leave when he heard a voice call out his name. "Praeses, Angelus, you will both come with me."

Feeling his heart sink, Remus turned and bowed. "Yes, my Lord."

Angelus struggled to his feet, smiling behind his mask. "My Lord."

The two men followed the Dark Lord and Amicus into an antechamber.

Voldemort wasn't impressed. "As members of the Order, you are supposed to be setting an example for the common Death Eaters,

and not brawling like a couple of schoolchildren. You may both remove your masks.” He turned to Remus. “Why did you attack Rosier?”

Dominic smirked. It looked as if the werewolf was finally going to get what he deserved.

“It was a personal disagreement between the two of us, my Lord.” Remus responded. He knew better than to make excuses, and opted for a simple explanation.

Voldemort nodded towards Dominic. “Since Lupin is a little reluctant to tell me, perhaps you would be so good as to tell me what happened.”

Dominic tipped his head towards Remus. “Lupin was impertinent. I was entirely justified in punishing him.”

“Why did you engage him in the first place?” Amicus took up the questioning.

“He had a Death Eater with him I didn’t recognize. Lupin refused to let me question him.” Dominic wasn’t going to tell Amicus that he’d used the encounter as a form of amusement.

“Lupin was acting under my instructions.” Amicus had never liked Rosier, despite his Master’s apparent regard for him.

Dominic’s smile dropped off his face. “I wasn’t aware of that.”

“It doesn’t matter whether you were aware or not.” Voldemort rejoined the conversation. “You should know better than to interfere with another member of the Order in front of common Death Eaters.”

Dominic dropped to his knees. “I’m sorry my Lord.”

Voldemort ignored him and turned his attention back to Remus. “At least you understand discretion; something our friend here apparently does not. Pass me your mask.”

Remus did as he was told, not entirely sure why the Dark Lord wanted his mask.

Voldemort held the mask in his hand before placing it at his side. "Rosier, I'd also like your mask."

Dominic passed his mask to Voldemort, the look of hatred for Remus evident on his face. He watched as the Dark Lord also placed his mask beside him before addressing the two men. "I can't allow such behavior to go unpunished. Remus, kneel."

Expecting to be placed under the Cruciatus, Remus was a little taken aback when nothing happened.

Voldemort stood up and passed Remus his mask back. "You will take Rosier's place at my side." He then looked down to where Rosier was still kneeling. "Rosier, if I find you attacking one of the Order again, you will be executed."

"Yes, my Lord." Dominic knew that he wouldn't get a second chance.

"You are to take Remus' place." Voldemort watched as Rosier struggled to hide his dismay at being demoted. Voldemort turned to Amicus. "Before he does, I think Rosier needs a little instruction in how to act properly."

Amicus bowed. "It will be my pleasure, my Lord."

"Have fun." Voldemort smiled nastily at Rosier before exiting the room.

Amicus turned to Rosier. "Get up."

Despite not scaring easily, Dominic suddenly found himself feeling very much afraid.

Remus watched as the two men left the room. Putting his newly altered mask back on, he hurried off towards the apparition point, only for one of the other Death Eaters to call out to him. "Finish off Praeses, did you?"

Remus immediately drew to a halt. "Not exactly."

Hearing Remus' voice, the Death Eater immediately realized his mistake. "I'm sorry, Praeses, I thought you were Angelus."

"I know what you thought." Remus viciously backhanded the Death Eater, sending him flying across the floor. "Don't make the same mistake again."

As much as he hated violence, Remus knew that if he hadn't have done something to punish the Death Eater's insolence, he would have been seen as weak by the others who were in the room. With Harry now part of the equation, he couldn't allow that to happen.

With Remus still standing over him, the Death Eater answered from his position on the floor. "I won't, Praeses. I apologize."

Remus stalked away and pushed open the doors to the apparition point. He just hoped that Harry had made it home alright.

Next Chapter: Harry is faced with the reality of his meeting with Amicus.

Chapter 46: The Lessons Begin

On apparating into the house, Remus' sensitive hearing picked up a faint sound coming from the drawing room, and he headed in that direction. He found Harry standing in a corner shivering in the dark, the mask Amicus had given him in his hand. Casting a spell, Remus lit the room and a fire sprang up in the hearth.

As the light fell onto Remus' mask, Harry gasped and unholstered his wand. "What have you done with my Dad?"

"Harry. It's just me." Remus made his voice gentle.

Harry still held his wand, reluctant to lower it until he was entirely sure it wasn't a trick. "Dad?"

It was then that Remus realized that he still had his mask on and he swiftly pulled it off. "It's okay, Harry."

Still shaking, Harry holstered his wand. "Your mask; I couldn't be sure."

Remus dropped his mask onto the floor and pulled Harry into his arms. "I'll explain shortly. Are you alright?"

Shaking his head, Harry finally gave into the tears that had been threatening to fall ever since he'd arrived home.

As Remus held a sobbing Harry he wanted to kill Amicus for what he'd done to his son. Eventually Harry's sobs lessened, and Remus gently pushed Harry away. "I need to let everyone know that you're safe."

Still not trusting his voice, Harry simply nodded and sat down as Remus headed for the fireplace in the sitting room. A few minutes later he returned. "I've contacted St. Mungo's. Sirius should be here shortly, after he lets Alice Longbottom know that you're alright."

Harry frowned. "Alice?"

“She’s at Hogwarts with Madam Pomfrey. She was there in case Madam Pomfrey couldn’t deal with any injuries you or the other Champions might have incurred.” Remus explained.

Feeling a little calmer, Harry asked how Remus had managed to get to him. “How did you find me?”

“At first nobody even realized that you’d disappeared. It was only when a Dementor emerged out of the Forest, that we all realized that something must be seriously wrong.” Remus told him. “By that time Krum had arrived back. Fleur Delacour was accounted for as she’d been injured by an acromantula and had to be rescued.”

“I heard her scream and saw the sparks but I couldn’t do anything to help her.” Harry told Remus.

“You weren’t supposed to.” Remus could see that Harry was bothered that he’d been unable to help. “Severus dealt with the acromantula that had attacked Fleur.”

Harry suddenly remembered about Riven. “Dad, was there supposed to be a centaur on the path?”

“No.” After the incident in the first task, Remus had insisted on knowing what Harry would face, as had Lily and Sirius. “What happened?”

Harry swiftly filled Remus in on his encounter. “Do you think he really meant me?”

“Unless Jamie speaks parseltongue, then I’d be inclined to say yes.” Remus was a little perplexed. “Right now though, that’s the least of my worries.”

“I know what you mean.” Harry smiled tremulously at Remus. “So what happened to Jamie?”

“He came out of the Forest just before I went in to find you.” Remus could see that Harry was a little disappointed that Jamie had beaten him back. “Not finding any trace of you at the beginning of the

pathway, I made my way to the clearing. I noticed that the vial had gone.”

Harry had forgotten about the vial and slipped his hand into his pocket, pulling it out and passing it to Remus. “Don’t open it. It’s Euphorbia; if you get it on you, it will burn.”

Remus took it from Harry and placed it to one side. “Amicus actually let you complete your task?”

Harry nodded. “I’d just picked up the vial, and was about to return to school, when I found I couldn’t move. He must have been hidden under some sort of invisibility spell. Once he’d taken my wand, he released me. I couldn’t risk the Forest without my wand and had to do as he told me. What happened once you’d reached the clearing?”

Remus continued with his story. “I could feel wards surrounding it and guessed something had happened to you. I also guessed that was why you hadn’t used your ring.”

Harry didn’t like to say that he’d forgotten about it yet again until he reached Amicus’ rooms, so he just let Remus assume that the wards had prevented him from trying. “So I presume you went back to the school.”

Remus had. “I headed back to Hogwarts and reported you missing, before heading for Hogsmeade. I wanted to be sure that if you did manage to activate your ring and were trying to make your way back to school, that I’d be there to meet you. Just after I left the school, my Dark Mark flared up. I apparated to the Dark Lord, who told me to make my way up to Amicus’ rooms.”

“When you went in there, I bet you didn’t expect to find me coming out of the bathroom.” Harry rubbed his head which had started to ache.

“I wondered if my summons had something to do with you, but you’re right; I never expected to see you walking calmly out of the bathroom like that.” Remus got up. “Let me get you something for that headache.”

Harry watched as Remus went into his study and came back out with a painkilling potion which he passed to Harry. "Do you have private rooms at Villa Laurifer?" Harry wondered if it was just a perk offered to Amicus.

Remus disabused him of his notion. "I do. They're not as luxurious as Amicus' though."

Harry looked down at Remus' mask, which he'd dropped onto the floor. "When you first walked into the drawing room, I thought you were Angelus. What happened to your mask?"

"I'll explain later. Sirius will be here soon." Remus picked the mask up and slipped it under his cloak. "I think I'd better transfigure my clothing. I'd hate for Sirius to see me dressed like this."

Harry picked up the mask that Amicus had given him. "What do I need to do with this?"

Remus held the mask up to the light. "Did you look at this after you took it off?"

Harry shook his head as Remus turned the mask round to face him. As he did so, Harry gasped. "It's turned silver!" He took the mask from Remus and twisted it around in his hand. "The symbols are the same as the ones on Amicus' mask except that they're red."

"Why does Harry have a Death Eater's mask?" Sirius' voice surprised both Harry and Remus.

Remus wondered why he hadn't heard Sirius come in. "I didn't hear you arrive."

"I apparated in rather than using the floo." Sirius informed Remus. Remus was aware that Sirius was one of the few people he knew who could apparate almost silently. Sirius knelt down and took the mask from Harry. "So would one of you care to tell me why Harry has this?"

Remus climbed to his feet. "Because Harry's just become Amicus' protégé."

Sirius could see that Harry was pale and looking more than a little upset. "How did you get back?"

"He let me go." Harry tried to keep to the truth. "But not before I agreed to become his pet project. Just before I left he gave me that."

Sirius passed Harry the mask back. "Why did you agree to it?"

"He threatened to kill my friends and family if I refused." Harry didn't tell him that Amicus had actually threatened to use Remus to do it instead of doing it himself.

The fireplace in the hallway flared and Lily stepped out. "Harry?"

"In here." Remus called out.

Lily ran into the drawing room and spotted Harry sitting on the floor. "Are you hurt?"

"No." Harry sighed. "Dad, would you do the honors?"

As Remus' oratory drew to a close, Lily, who had gone pale, swayed on her feet. Sirius immediately got up and slipped an arm around Lily's waist before drawing down onto the nearest sofa.

After listening to Remus tell Lily and Sirius what had happened, Harry could feel himself beginning to shake again as the reality of what had happened began to set in properly.

Sirius looked down at Harry. "Don't you think you might be a little more comfortable up off the floor?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm glad I'm sitting down. I think I might have drunk a little too much for me."

Lily looked up, her face strained. "What the hell were you doing drinking?"

"I wasn't given the option." Harry defended himself.

Remus put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "Give him a break, Lily. I think he's probably been through enough."

Lily immediately looked remorseful. "Sorry, I'm just worried about him."

"Join the club." Remus smiled at his friend. "Not quite how we envisaged spending Valentine's Day is it?"

Lily shook her head. "Not exactly, no." Lily looked over at Harry. "There must be something we can do. I'm not letting you become a slave to that monster."

"I don't really have a lot of choice. He'll kill you all if I don't turn up on my birthday." Harry could feel tears pricking his eyes again.

Remus noticed that Harry was struggling to control his emotions. "Come here."

Harry shook his head. "I can't afford to be weak anymore."

"Harry, you're only fourteen. No-one your age should have to put up with this shit." Remus felt impotent. "I feel like crying myself."

Harry laughed through his tears. "I think I've shed enough tears for both of us." Harry wiped his eyes with the back of sleeve, and took a deep breath. "I'm scared, Dad."

"Me too." Remus sank back down to his knees next to Harry and gently pushed Harry's hair out of his face before pulling him towards him. "If I could take your place I would, but I can't."

Harry could feel Remus shaking. "You can't save everyone, Dad."

Despite the fact that Harry was her son, Lily felt like an intruder. "Sirius, let's give them a moment."

Sirius followed Lily out of the room.

Lily and Sirius both looked up as Remus came into the kitchen. From his red-rimmed eyes, it was obvious he'd been crying. Sirius passed a glass of scotch to Remus. "You look as if you need this. Where's Harry?"

"Bathroom. He wants to wash his face." Remus knew he probably should have done the same, but he also knew that he didn't care what he looked like at that moment. "I don't know what to do."

"I don't think there's anything you can do." Sirius pushed the bottle of scotch towards Remus as his friend emptied his glass.

Harry walked into the kitchen and shuddered at the sight of the alcohol. "I think I'll just have some milk."

Having been in the house quite a few times, Lily knew where everything was kept. Getting up, she fetched Harry a glass of milk. "It will probably help settle your stomach."

Harry gratefully took the glass before sitting down. "I think I can safely say that this is the worst day of my life."

Sirius got up. "I just want to check in with Alice; I'll be back in a moment."

Lily waited until she was sure Sirius had left. "Is there anything else I should know?"

Remus nodded. "There is, but it will have to wait until Sirius isn't around."

Harry put his hand over Remus'. "This is my entire fault. If I hadn't wanted to learn the patronus charm and how to be an animagus, then Amicus would have never noticed me."

"If you hadn't, then you'd probably be dead." Remus reminded him. "Sirius is coming back."

The other two hadn't heard anything but Remus' sharp hearing had caught the sound of footsteps returning.

Sirius walked back into the kitchen. "Everyone at Hogwarts has been told that you strayed off the path and was attacked by a venomous plant which rendered you unconscious; which is why you couldn't use your wand. Dumbledore announced that I helped Remus in the search for you and that you're now at St. Mungo's recovering. I've arranged for you to return to school on Monday, if that's alright with you, Remus. I thought Harry could do with the break."

Harry looked hopefully at Remus who smiled gratefully at Sirius. "Thanks, Sirius."

Lily frowned as Harry yawned widely. "I think it's time you got some sleep."

"I'm not sure I'm going to be able to sleep with all these thoughts running through my mind." Harry admitted.

"I'd offer to obliviate you, but I have the feeling you're going to need your memories intact." Sirius watched as Harry's face became hopeful and then resigned.

Harry smiled ruefully. "I think you're right about needing to keep my memories no matter how much I want them gone. However, I wouldn't say no to some Dreamless Sleep Potion."

Sirius smiled and pulled a vial out of his pocket. "I thought you might need some."

Harry took the vial from Sirius before hugging everyone and setting off for his bedroom.

Remus poured himself another drink. "I don't think I'm ever going to be able to sleep again."

"There's nothing we can do, is there?" Lily pulled the glass away from Remus and knocked it back, before coughing.

Sirius took the glass away from her; Lily and strong liquor didn't go well together. "I'll get you some wine."

Remus filled up his glass again. "This is going to be my last scotch. I'll take a glass of red if you can find some in there."

Sirius laughed freely for the first time since he'd arrived. "You know very well you've got a bloody cellar the size of a quidditch pitch beneath the house, to say nothing of this wine room."

Remus grinned back. "It's only polite to pretend that I haven't. Anyway, the cellar belongs to Harry, not me."

Sirius looked over the wine room before making his way down to the cellar and picking out a bottle of wine. "I thought we'd have some of the good stuff."

Remus wasn't particularly a wine aficionado but even he recognized the Chateau Mouton Rothschild that Sirius returned with. "What year is it?"

"1928" Sirius informed him.

"But that's a bloody expensive bottle of wine." Remus exclaimed.

Sirius shrugged. "Under the circumstances, I doubt very much whether Harry will mind or even care."

Remus was surprised when Sirius used a muggle corkscrew to open the bottle. "Why don't you just use your wand?"

"I've had too many bottles explode on me. I've found that muggle corkscrews are better equipped to do the job." Sirius explained as he poured them all large glasses of the wine. "Thankfully magic means that I don't need to decant it."

Remus savored the mouthful he took from the glass and moaned appreciatively. "That is so good."

Lily looked equally blissful. "Just what I needed."

Sirius raised his own glass before trying it. "To Harry." The other two copied Sirius' gesture.

Sirius put his glass down. "As much as I hate to say it, we're going to have to teach Harry how to defend himself."

"Light spells aren't going to get Harry through this." Remus waited for Sirius to explode and was surprised when he didn't.

"I'm well aware of that." Sirius responded quietly.

"Will you do it?" Lily asked Remus. "You're the only one of us at school with him."

Remus shook his head. "I can't attack my own son."

"You were the best defense teacher that Hogwarts had had for a long time." Lily argued.

"That might be the case but I'm not putting my own son under something like the Cruciatus." Remus knew he wouldn't be able to do it. "But I know someone who might."

"You mean Snivellus don't you?" Sirius pulled a face at the thought of Snape.

Remus nodded. "He probably knows more dark spells than I do."

"Tell me something I don't know." Sirius sneered. "I'm surprised he didn't apply for the defense position when you moved."

"Dumbledore didn't give him the chance." Remus enlightened Sirius.

"Why did you move?" Sirius leant back in his chair and stretched. "I thought you loved Defense."

"I love history more." Remus was telling the truth. "I jumped at the chance when Binns vanished."

Sirius smiled happily as his joints popped, making Lily wince. "Sorry Lils but I get so tense when I'm not sure if an operation is going to go to plan."

Lily looked concerned. "Did everything work out?"

Sirius looked a little smug. "Oh yes. It couldn't have gone better if I'd rehearsed it first."

"I'm glad." Lily then returned to the subject of Binns. "I wonder what happened to Binns. I'm surprised he moved on after so long."

"Dumbledore had no idea. Perhaps he'd just had enough of teaching." Remus suggested, even though he knew that Binns had been far from willing to move onto the next world. He'd gone kicking and screaming to the other side when Remus had apologized before exorcising him.

"Dumbledore probably did it himself." Sirius remarked before looking around the kitchen. "Do you have anything nice to eat?"

Remus shook his head. "No-one's supposed to be living here. I sent the house-elves to the main Potter Estate. I'll get Pasha and Gotobed back tomorrow for a few days."

Lily stood up. "I'll be back in a moment." She returned shortly with a large plate of apple pie and a jug of cream. "Help yourself."

Sirius found himself a plate before taking almost a third of the pie. He stood up. "I'm going to sit down in the drawing room. These chairs aren't exactly comfortable when you've been busy for most of the day."

Remus sat down in the chair closest to the fireplace, leaving the loveseat for Lily and Sirius to sit down together.

Lily sighed. "I wish I knew who Amicus was."

"Why's that?" Sirius slung his arm around his wife.

“Because I’d kill him before I let him anywhere near my son again.” Lily said quietly.

“I thought you might say that.” Sirius kissed Lily on the top of her head.

The three friends fell silent for a moment before Lily smiled brightly. “I think it’s time for a change of topic. I’m going to go mad if I have to think about what that bastard has done to my son.”

Sirius patted her knee. “You’re quite right.” He smiled at Remus. “I know what we can talk about instead. Remus, you never did tell me why you went all the way to France to become a teacher.”

Remus took a mouthful of wine before answering. “Olympe Maxime offered me an assistant teaching position which meant I could pursue my history and defense degrees in the wizarding section at Oxford University. It wasn’t too far to apparate back and forth.”

“I remember you saying you were going to teach in France, but I never really asked you why you didn’t join Hogwarts.” Lily had always wondered.

“As you know they don’t have teaching assistants. I needed the money to support me while I studied and Beauxbatons not only provided me with good experience, but a roof over my head and a decent meal.” The years Remus had been trying to get his degrees had been hard for him.

“What did you do during the holidays?” Sirius leant forward, interested in what his friend had to say.

“I rented a cheap apartment and worked in a bookstore.” Remus could still remember how it had felt having to do without to make ends meet. When he’d taken Virginie LeStrange in, he’d had to juggle studies, the bookstore at weekends and working at Beauxbatons to try and pay the rent, but he didn’t pass this bit of information onto Sirius. He turned the focus back onto Sirius. “Your turn. The last I’d heard you were in the Auror Corps.”

Sirius' face clouded over. "After the way the Aurors treated me when I was accused of betraying James, I couldn't face becoming part of that again. I decided to seek a totally different form of employment."

Remus could have kicked himself for bringing up the subject of Aurors, and changed his focus to that of Sirius' medical training. "Do you enjoy the medical field?"

Sirius' expression changed immediately. "I love it. Craig has been a great boss. I don't think I'd have managed as well as I have done without his support." Sirius grinned. "When I was training, he spent far too many nights drilling me on surgical techniques and potions."

"How many of them nights were you actually sober?" Remus teased.

"All of them unfortunately. I waited until I'd qualified before going on a serious bender." Sirius shuddered. "I'm surprised I didn't kill myself."

Lily remembered the night he'd passed his exams. "I'd never seen him so drunk before. He had two hangover potions and still felt awful."

Remus laughed. "I'm pleased to say that I don't have that problem so much."

"I'd say lucky you, but I think I'd rather live with the hangovers." Sirius yawned. "I think I'm going to hit the sack. I'll stay the night here if you don't mind. With Cassie staying at Narcy's, we don't need to get back."

Remus didn't bother getting up. "Take any room on the third floor."

Lily kissed Sirius. "I'll be up later. I'm still too wound up to sleep."

"I could help you out there." Sirius waggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Lily swatted him on his behind. "You're incorrigible. I'll be up in a little while."

Remus waited until he heard Sirius climb the stairs and shut the bedroom behind him. "I really could do with speaking to Dae and Severus but I don't want to disturb them this late in the evening."

"Amicus has given Harry until his fifteenth birthday so I think you can wait to talk to them for another few hours." Lily poured more wine into both of their glasses. "Why do you think Amicus didn't initiate Harry now?"

Remus knew his answer was going to upset Lily. "Fifteen is usually the youngest that Death Eaters are inducted. Before then they haven't necessarily got the power needed to invoke the killing curse."

Lily clutched the side of the sofa she was sitting on. "You mean Harry's got to kill someone?"

Remus nodded. "It's the only way in."

"But Amicus obviously wants him; why does Harry still have to kill someone?" Lily could hear her voice trembling.

Remus walked over to sit by Lily and laid his hand over her own. "It isn't Amicus' rule; it's the Dark Lord's."

"Did you have to do it?" Lily laughed bitterly, and then answered her own question. "Of course you did. Sorry, I shouldn't have asked you that."

Remus answered her anyway. "I did; I had to kill a muggle."

Lily couldn't decide if she wanted to know about it, but out of horror and curiosity, the curiosity won out. "Who decided who you'd have to kill?"

"As my sponsor, Dae did." Remus answered quietly.

"Does... does Harry have a sponsor?" Lily asked hesitantly.

"He does. Amicus selected me to be Harry's sponsor." Remus watched as the impact of his words hit Lily.

Lily was aghast. "You're going to have to select Harry's first kill?"

Remus explained how it worked. "That's the way it usually goes. Occasionally the Dark Lord will decide on the target, but in this case I have the feeling that Amicus deliberately made me Harry's sponsor."

Lily stood up and began pacing. "How will you decide?"

Remus also got to his feet, and pulled Lily close to him. "Lily calm down. I'll do everything I can to try and make it easy."

Snuggled up against Remus, Lily relaxed a little. "Can't you do it for him?"

Remus shook his head. "Amicus will probably be watching. If I could, I would."

Lily pulled free of his embrace. "I'll do it. We can use polyjuice."

"You can't. Once Harry's completed the task, I'll have to apparate him to the Dark Lord to be given the Dark Mark." Remus pulled Lily back down on the sofa beside him. "You'd be found out."

Lily looked broken. "But there must be something I can do."

"There isn't." Remus pulled Lily close to him, trying to comfort her.

Hatred for Amicus boiled up in Lily. "If I ever find out who that bastard is, I swear I'll kill him."

"I know, I know." Remus soothed Lily as she shook angrily. "Enough about Harry. Tell me, how is your new position coming along?"

Lily recognized Remus' diversionary tactic for what it was, but gratefully seized upon it. "I absolutely love it. Even though a lot of what I'm doing is research, there's still enough charms work to keep me occupied."

“Have you made any headway with the research I gave you?” Remus let go of Lily and walked back into the kitchen to pick up a second bottle of wine before returning to hear her answer.

“A little.” Lily looked excited as she discussed her findings. “The Mark has numerous tendrils which I think need to be undone before it can be banished. It’s discovering how to do this that’s the difficult part, but I’ll keep working on it.”

“Thanks Lily. Now that Harry is involved, I’m more concerned than ever about trying to find a way to break its hold.” Remus swallowed some of the red wine he’d picked out.

“I understand.” Lily slipped her hand into Remus’, feeling more comforted that she’d done in a long time. “I’d like to see your Dark Mark again if possible.”

Remus put down his glass. “Now?”

Lily nodded excitedly, her eyes gleaming. “Do you think we should move to somewhere a little less exposed?”

Remus stood up and pulled Lily to her feet before deliberately breaking his wine glass. “Let’s go into the bathroom. At least then if Sirius comes down, I can say I slipped on the wine and cut my back, and that you’re cleaning my cut out for me.”

Lily raised an eyebrow at Remus’ deviousness but eagerly followed him into the large bathroom off the hallway. “Take off your shirt.”

Remus stripped off his shirt and turned to face the wall. “Don’t worry if you hurt me.”

Lily pulled out her wand and immediately began casting charms on the Dark Mark, muttering as she did so. After a short time, she put her wand away. “That should be enough to keep me going for a while.”

Remus turned round as he pulled his shirt back on. “Let me know when you need to see it again. I can always arrange to leave

Hogwarts on a weekend.” Remus frowned as Lily suddenly stumbled backwards. “Are you alright?”

Not wanting Remus to realize that she suddenly felt a little uncomfortable at the sight of his bare chest, Lily grinned contritely. “I must have drunk more than I thought.”

Remus laughed. “In that case, I think it’s time you went to bed. Sirius is probably wondering where you’ve gotten to.”

Lily laughed as well. “I doubt it. He’s probably snoring like a fiend by now.” She then gently kissed Remus on the cheek. “Goodnight, Remus.”

“Night, Lily.” Remus hugged Lily before kissing her on the cheek and letting her go. He watched as she made her way up the stairs. For a moment there he’d thought that that Lily had been a little too interested in his chest but deciding that he was imagining it, and that she simply had been drunk, Remus dismissed his notion as ridiculous and made his way back into the sitting room. Noticing that there was still half a bottle of red wine left, Remus dimmed the lights before sitting down in front of the fireplace to watch the flames flicker and dance.

The Next Day

Harry awoke with a start. Getting up, he made his way into the bathroom before heading downstairs to find Remus sitting at the table having breakfast. “Morning, Dad.”

“Good morning, Harry.” Remus reached over to pull out a chair for Harry. “What do you want to eat?”

“Just cereal. My stomach still feels a little queasy.” Harry smiled gratefully at Remus when he passed his son a hangover cure potion. “Thanks Dad.”

“I thought you might need something after the firewhiskey.” Remus grinned before his face became serious. “After breakfast, come into my study. We need to talk.”

After pushing his cereal around the bowl for twenty minutes, Harry finally gave up trying to eat, and headed in the direction of his Dad's study.

Harry knocked on the door. "Come in." Remus was wading through a pile of papers. "These just arrived. Severus thought I might like my students' papers to mark."

"You're not going back to Hogwarts yet?" Harry had expected to be told that he'd be going to stay with Lily for a few days.

"No. Severus has agreed to cover my classes." Remus put down the papers.

Harry wondered how Hermione had actually dealt with the news of his disappearance. "Did he say whether Hermione was alright?"

"She's fine, Harry." Remus reassured him. "She, like everyone else, believes you were attacked by a plant and that you lost your wand, which is why you couldn't send up a signal for help. She and Severus will be arriving on Sunday morning." Remus nodded towards the chair. "I think you should sit down as I'm not sure how long our discussion is going to take."

Harry didn't sit down. "So what do you want to talk about?"

Remus looked faintly amused. "As if you have to ask. We need to discuss last night now that Sirius isn't around, so I recommend that you take a seat."

Harry finally did as Remus suggested and sat down. Harry had hoped that he could just bury his head in the sand, and that the previous night's events would go away. Knowing that that was never going to happen, he gave his Dad his full attention. "What about last night?"

"I want you to understand what you're going to have to go through when you're inducted." Remus hated having to discuss such matters with Harry.

“What will it be like?” Harry asked quietly.

“It goes without saying that taking the Dark Mark is going to hurt like a bitch.” Remus tried hard to think of how to describe it to Harry. “But the feeling when you are marked is one that doesn’t even come close to anything else. It’s hard to describe. You feel elated, sad, powerful and powerless, all at the same time.”

Harry frowned. “How can you feel all those things at once?”

“I’m sorry to say that you’ll find out.” Remus turned to the matter that was worrying him most. “As your sponsor, I have to choose your first kill.”

Harry blanched. “Do I really have to kill someone? Amicus has already said he wants me.”

“As I explained to Lily last night, it’s the Dark Lord’s rule, not Amicus’. I’m afraid you have little choice.” Remus said bitterly. “But I’ll do whatever I can to make it easier on you.”

“How can killing anyone be ‘easy’ on someone?” Harry knew he sounded sarcastic, but he couldn’t help it.

“It isn’t.” Remus felt frustrated as he knew that in reality there was little he could do to make Harry’s task easier.

Harry could see the strain on his Dad’s face, and knew his next question wasn’t going to help matters. “What was your first time like?”

“Dae apparated me to a normal Muggle street in the center of London. He pointed to a man who was walking his dog, and told me to kill me. The man had never done anything to hurt me but I still had to kill him.” Remus laughed bitterly. “My hand was shaking so badly I almost missed. After I’d done it, I was sick to my stomach. Dae simply waited for me to finish before side apparating me to receive the second half of my Dark Mark.”

After listening to what Remus had had to go through, Harry climbed to his feet and shook his head wildly. "I can't do it, Dad, I can't do it." He then began to back up until he reached the wall.

Remus thought that his son looked like a cornered animal. "I wish I could do something to change things, but I can't. Even if I sacrificed myself, and tried to kill Amicus, the repercussions if I failed would be too dreadful to contemplate. He'd not only kill you, but everyone else he promised to."

"I think I'm going to be sick." Harry promptly threw up over Remus, who'd moved over to try and comfort Harry.

Remus cleaned up the mess, and passed Harry a calming potion. "Drink this."

Harry took the potion, relaxing as it began to take effect. "Sorry Dad. I don't know what happened."

"You're frightened, Harry, and quite understandably." Remus poured out a glass of water and passed it to Harry. "You're faced with having to do something that you find abhorrent."

Harry drank the cleansing water. "How am I supposed to kill someone when I've never even cast an unforgiveable before?"

"By the time your birthday arrives, you'll have learnt how to master all three Unforgivables." Remus stood up. "We can start with a simple curse, the Imperius."

"But my wand..." Harry didn't want his wand to be used like that.

"I'm going to arrange for a replacement wand for you." Remus handed over his own wand. "This is my duplicate wand. You can use this for the time being."

"Do all Death Eaters carry a duplicate wand?" Harry suspected they might.

“As far as I know they do.” Remus unholstered his personalized wand. “I rarely use this wand now. Even though the wand I’ve just given you to use isn’t exactly ideal for me, I’ve learnt how to use it to its full potential. I’ve had to learn to overpower my spells to compensate for the lack of perfect compatibility.”

“So where did you get this wand from?” Harry was surprised at how closely the wand resembled Remus’ bespoke wand.

“There’s a store in Knockturn Alley that will get you just about anything you need.” Remus smiled as he remembered Harry’s curiosity about the street. “And the answer’s still no; I’m not taking you down there.”

Harry was disappointed. His Dad had always refused to take him into Knockturn Alley, and it looked as if that rule was going to remain in force, even despite the current situation. “I know that.”

“Do you want to get started now or do you have any more questions?” Remus could tell Harry wasn’t very keen on learning the Unforgivables.

“I’ve got a question about your mask. Why had it changed when you got back?” Harry remembered his fear when he’d thought that it was Angelus, and not his Dad who had found him the previous night.

“The altercation I had with Angelus ended up with him putting me under both the Imperius and Cruciatus curses.” Remus told him. “I ended up turning the tables and threatening Angelus. What I didn’t know was that the Dark Lord and Amicus had been watching. To cut a long story short, I’ve now assumed Angelus’ former position and he’s taken mine.”

“So you now rank just below Amicus?” Harry couldn’t believe how high Remus had now climbed in the Death Eater hierarchy.

“I do.” Remus leant back against his chair. “But I think your new position has a lot to do with it. I’m not sure that the Dark Lord would have acted quite so favorably towards with me without it. Either that, or the Dark Lord hates Angelus’ guts.”

“Why would he hate Angelus?” Harry asked. “He made him one of his guards.”

“I’ve no idea but he certainly seemed delighted at the thought of Amicus taking Angelus out to be “re-educated.” Remus stood up. “We need to get on. I’m afraid I’m going to need a few hours sleep after we’ve had some practice.”

Harry had forgotten that it was the full moon that night, and reluctantly stood up as well. “Let’s go then.”

Remus led Harry to the top floor of the house and into the dueling room that had been put in by Harry’s grandfather. “Can you give me my wand back for a moment? I’d use my bespoke one, but I’d prefer for no trace of anything we’re going to do here to register on it.”

Harry passed the wand over. “What are you going to do?”

Remus started to place cushioning spells over the floor. “I’m going to put you under the Imperius so that you have some idea of what it feels like before you begin to try the curse on me.”

Harry found that he wasn’t bothered by the thought of Remus using the Unforgivable on him. “I’m ready.”

“Move to the middle of the floor.” Remus then took up a spot directly opposite Harry. “I won’t do anything embarrassing or uncomfortable; it’s just to show you how it feels.”

“I know you wouldn’t.” Harry smiled reassuring at his Dad.

“Imperio.” Remus watched as Harry became glassy eyed and looked a little dreamy. “Sing for me, Harry.”

Harry, who felt as if he was floating, happily complied and began singing a childhood lullaby that Remus had once sang to him. Suddenly he felt normal again, and hurriedly closed his mouth. “That was so odd. I felt as if I wanted to drift away; that I’d do anything to obey your voice.”

“That’s the simplicity and terribleness of the Imperius curse. People have done some awful things while under it. If you’re under it long enough, it begins to feel like a state of normality.” Remus was glad he was resistant to it.

“Can I try on you now?” Despite the potential nastiness of the curse, after experiencing it, Harry was itching to try it out.

“Of course.” Remus passed his wand across to Harry. “Just put as much power as you can into the spell and incant the spell clearly.”

Harry swapped places with Remus and aimed the wand at his Dad. “Imperio.”

Remus’ eyes went glassy, and he felt the lightheaded sensation that came with the Imperius curse. He heard Harry tell him to whistle. Remus shook it off. “Sorry Harry but I can throw it off easily.”

Harry frowned. “Why didn’t you tell me that you could shake it off so effortlessly?”

“Because I wanted you to try it without any reservations.” Remus took the wand back. “You actually did pretty well. I felt the initial stages of the Imperius but because I can throw it off, I was easily able to ignore your command.”

“I want to be able to do that as well. How do I do it?” Harry demanded.

“You need to try and ignore your inner voice; the one that’s telling you how nice it would be if you simply gave in.” Remus nodded towards the former spot he’d just vacated. “Into position.”

Something suddenly occurred to Harry. “Why did you cushion the floor?”

“We’ll discuss that in a little while.” Remus aimed his wand. “Are you ready?”

Harry nodded. Once again the feeling came over him, and once again he gave into the delicious sensations.

Remus dropped the spell. "Don't be disappointed you didn't manage it; there aren't many people who can actually fight off the effects of the Imperius. I've always had a natural immunity, which is why it comes easily to me."

Harry returned to his previous question. "Why are the floors cushioned?"

"You're going to be putting the Cruciatus curse on me." Remus could see that Harry wasn't very happy at the news. "And I don't particularly feel like hurting myself if I hit the floor."

Harry immediately refused. "I'm not doing it."

"You've got to. You'll be expected to be able to perform all three Unforgivables, as well as a large range of spells by the time you're inducted. As your sponsor, it's my responsibility to make sure you're capable of doing them." Remus hated the dismal look that settled on Harry's face.

Harry chewed on his bottom lip, a habit he'd picked up from Hermione. "In that case, I need to know how it feels first."

Remus shook his head. "Absolutely not. There's no way I'm putting you under the Cruciatus."

"Why not?" Harry asked. "You put the Imperius curse on me."

"That was different. The Imperius curse didn't hurt you. The Cruciatus curse will." Remus pointed out. "You're my son; you can expect me to hurt you like that."

"But you expect me to do it to you." Harry argued.

"That's different." Remus could see that Harry was going to be stubborn about the whole thing. "I've been placed under it before; it won't be so bad for me."

"I'm not doing it unless you subject me to it first." Harry stood there and crossed his arms defiantly.

Remus pleaded with Harry. "Please don't ask me to do it."

"Dad, I need to know how it feels." Harry said quietly and moved into position in the middle of the floor.

Remus sighed and raised his wand. "If I do this, then it's going to hurt more than anything you've ever felt before."

"I managed with my broken ribs and kneecap." Harry observed.

"Believe me when I say that you'd rather have the broken bones." Remus suddenly lowered his wand. "Harry, I can't do this."

"Yes you can. On my birthday I'm going to have to do something I don't want to do." Harry pointed out. "If you don't do it, then I'm not going to carry on with my training, Amicus and everyone else be damned." Harry was adamant; if Remus didn't do it, then it was over.

"You should have been in Slytherin!" Remus scowled at his son as he raised his wand again. "Very well. Are you ready?"

Despite his bravado, Harry suddenly felt extremely afraid as he remembered how his Dad had made Pettigrew scream. Not wanting to back down though, he nodded bravely. "Go ahead."

Remus closed his eyes for a moment before taking a deep breath and incanting the spell. "Crucio."

Harry immediately fell to the floor and began screaming; he'd never felt such pain. It felt as if white-hot needles were piercing his body and as if his bones were on fire. After what felt like an eternity, the pain stopped. Harry gasped.

Remus fell to his knees. "I'm so sorry, Harry."

Harry shook his head. "I needed to know." He looked up at Remus. "How long was I under it for?"

"Ten, fifteen seconds at most." Remus had barely held the spell on Harry; seeing his son in so much pain had been too distressing for him.

"It felt a lot longer." Harry winced as he sat up. "That hurt a lot more than I thought it would."

Remus felt awful. "I tried to underpower the spell as much as I could."

Harry was shocked. "You underpowered the spell?"

Remus nodded. "You didn't think that I'd actually subject you to a fully blown Cruciatus curse did you?"

"I did. I didn't even know that the spell could be underpowered." Harry sat up. "I'm shaking."

Remus reached into his pocket. "I brought this up for me but you'd better take it."

Harry took the vial and uncorked it before swiftly swallowed its contents. After a short time, his shakes began to abate. "That feels much better."

Remus pulled Harry to his feet. "It's your turn now."

Harry felt sick and wanted to refuse but knew that he couldn't especially after making Remus subject him to the curse. With sweaty palms, he took the wand from Remus. "What do I have to do?"

"The Cruciatus is powered by negative emotions such as anger and hate. You need to try and channel one of those emotions when you incant the spell." Remus moved into position. "Go ahead."

Harry tried to stop his hand shaking as he raised the wand, before lowering it again. "I'm not sure I can do this."

Remus smiled sympathetically. "It's hard isn't it? Just take a deep breath, close your eyes and incant the spell. It might be easier if you can't see me." Remus didn't actually expect Harry to do him much damage as this was his first time, and the wand he was using wasn't compatible.

Harry did as Remus instructed and closed his eyes. Taking a deep breath, he thought of Amicus threatening to use Remus as his family's executioner. Letting his anger grow, Harry's eyes suddenly snapped open as he yelled out. "Crucio."

Harry couldn't believe it when his Dad immediately began screaming and fell to the floor. Almost instantly Harry lost concentration and Remus stopped writhing. "Are you alright Dad?"

Remus struggled to his knees and lifted his head. Harry gasped as he saw blood running down his Dad's chin. "Oh Merlin, I did something wrong. You're bleeding."

Remus wiped his face; his voice coming out in a slight lisp. "You didn't. I bit through my tongue."

Harry blanched. "I'm never doing that again."

Remus held out a hand for the wand which Harry passed to him, and promptly cast a healing spell on his mouth. He sighed as his tongue healed, before reaching into his pocket for a second vial of anti-cruciatus potion. After swallowing it, he looked up at Harry. "I didn't expect your curse to be so powerful."

"Why not?" Harry sat down next to his Dad.

"Because most people aren't powerful enough to cast a spell of that magnitude." Remus grinned wryly. "I should have known you'd be different."

"I was thinking of Amicus and his threats." Harry informed Remus. "I felt so angry when I thought about him and I just let my anger go when I invoked the spell."

“That’s exactly what you need to do.” Remus climbed to his feet and pulled Harry up with him. “But whatever you do, you can’t let yourself become immersed in your anger. If you do, that’s when dark magic becomes addictive.”

Harry divulged what he’d already learnt about dark magic. “Cho Chang said as much to me when I went to see her in the hospital. She told me about the spells she’d learnt from Tom Riddle; she said that the more she learned, the more she wanted to learn.”

“She’s right. If you let yourself, you’ll become captivated by the pull of the magic.” Remus started to walk towards the door.

“Why haven’t you?” Harry followed his Dad, glad to be leaving the room.

“I’m already a dark creature, Harry.” Remus headed downstairs and towards his room to get changed. “I’m in a constant battle with my darker nature. Ignoring the pull came easily to me.”

“How will I do it?” Harry was a little worried now.

“You need an anchor, which is why I think you should tell Hermione about what’s happened, rather than leaving her to believe what Dumbledore has told everyone else.” Remus stopped outside his bedroom. “You’re also going to need a dueling partner.”

“No way.” Harry refused point blank. “I’m not doing that to Hermione.”

“I don’t expect you to.” Remus opened his door. “Come in for a moment while I sort out some clothes.”

Harry followed his Dad into his room. Harry had asked Pasha and Gotobed to organize the room as Remus had wished. When they’d first arrived at the house, the room had been decorated in dismal dark blues and yellows. Now it was furnished with cherry woods, tobacco colored furnishings and light rugs spread over the wooden floor.

Remus opened his closet. “I was thinking of someone like Dudley or Draco.”

“Why can’t you be my partner?” Harry sat down on the bed and watched as Remus pulled out fresh clothing.

“Because I won’t be teaching you when we get back. I’m going to ask Severus to take over your training, but he won’t always be available so you need someone to help you practice.” Remus opened the bathroom door and set the shower running.

“Why can’t you teach me?” Harry liked Severus but preferred his Dad.

“He knows more dark spells than I do.” Remus stopped at the bathroom door. “And I really can’t face putting you under the Cruciatus again.”

Harry looked horrified. “You mean I’ll have to go through that again?”

“Yes.” Remus moved back towards Harry. “If the Dark Lord or Amicus were to put you under it, it’s likely they’d hold you under it for a lot longer than I just did, and with a lot more power behind it. You need to build up some sort of immunity to it.”

“But you just collapsed in agony. There’s no way you’ve built up any sort of immunity to it.” Harry pointed out.

Remus smiled softly. “Harry, you have absolutely no idea how powerful the spell you cast was. If I hadn’t have had some sort of immunity to it, you’d have hurt me a lot more than you did.”

Harry was incredulous. “I don’t know what to say.”

“I’m afraid we’re going to have to talk about this again tomorrow. Right now I really need to get showered and get some sleep. Why don’t you go downstairs into the study and get some schoolwork done. There are a few assignments that Severus sent for you.” Remus gently shepherded Harry out of the room. “I’ll see you before I go into the cellar.”

Harry had been about to close the door when Remus winced; he frowned at his Dad. “What’s wrong?”

"The Dark Lord." Remus swore under his breath. "I've got to go."

Harry was surprised. "But why would he call you now? Wouldn't he think you're in school?"

"He obviously knows differently." Remus transfigured his clothes and stopped the shower. "Don't expect me back today."

Harry's stomach began to go over again. "Do you think he needs you to, you know?"

"I don't know." Remus got his mask from his trunk, before hugging Harry and wincing again. "I've really got to go."

"Be careful." Harry watched as Remus apparated out of the room.

Not really in the mood for schoolwork, Harry headed for the library instead.

Next Chapter: Voldemort makes a move; Severus assesses Harry's skills; Remus spots Nym in an unexpected place; Harry makes a decision.

Chapter 47: Deaths, Dates and Decisions

The Next Day

Harry was woken by Pasha. "Good morning, Master Harry. Does you want breakfast here?"

Harry shook his head. "Is Dad back?"

"Yes, Master Harry. Master Remus sleeps." Pasha disappeared out of the room.

Harry hurried out of his room and into Remus' bedroom, gasping as he laid eyes on Remus. "Dad?"

Remus groaned and sat up. "Ouch."

"What happened to you?" Harry was horrified by the wounds that covered Remus' upper body.

"I got into a bit of a fight." Remus looked exhausted. "I'm going to take a shower. Can you get me a pepper-up potion, a pain-killing potion, and some bruise salve?"

Harry left the room and grabbed what Remus needed. He then instructed Pasha to serve their breakfast in Remus' room. When Harry got back, the shower was still running and Hedwig was tapping on the window. Harry rushed to open it. "Hi Hedwig, what are you doing here?"

Hedwig hooted and held out her leg. Harry took the newspaper that was attached to it. "Thanks Hedwig." After relinquishing her load, Hedwig flew over to the end of the bed. Harry sat down and opened the Prophet. "Oh fuck."

Remus opened the bathroom door just in time to catch Harry's cursing. "Harry!"

Harry blushed. "Sorry Dad." He held up the Prophet. "You were part of this weren't you?"

Remus nodded. "Yes. It's why the Dark Lord summoned me yesterday."

"I think that everyone's going to finally know that Voldemort's back now." Harry put down the paper which had huge headlines: 'You-Know-Who' Returns: Azkaban Destroyed'. "Did you kill anyone?"

Remus lifted an eyebrow. "What do you think?"

Harry took Remus' non-answer to mean yes. "I see Voldemort has one of his lieutenants back." Harry picked up the Prophet again, and turned it to face Remus. "What happened to the place? It looks as if a bomb went off."

"As you rightly noted, Bella's now free." Remus sat down to pull on his socks. "The Dark Lord easily destroyed Azkaban to get her and several other Death Eaters out."

"What about the Dementors?" Harry jumped as Pasha popped into the room with breakfast. "Put it on the table over there please."

Pasha did as she was told and vanished without speaking; she'd felt the tension in the room when she'd popped in, and didn't want to hang around.

"They've left Azkaban. The Dark Lord has them under his control now." Remus took the potions that Harry had placed on the side table, steam coming out of his ears as he took the pepper-up.

"Why did he wait this long before acting?" Harry moved over to the table where breakfast had been laid out.

"As I said before, I don't think the resurrection went as well as Amicus hoped." Remus walked over to the table and sat down, trying not to wince as his muscles screamed despite the painkiller. "I believe it's taken him this long to regain his strength."

Harry looked down at the newspaper which he'd dropped onto the table beside him. "Looking at the damage he's done to Azkaban, I'd say he's pretty strong again."

"He is." Remus filled his plate. He was usually always hungry after his transformation, and today was no exception. "I've got a feeling that whatever went wrong with the resurrection has been put right."

"I wonder how?" Harry hated mysteries.

"I don't know, but I think that whatever he did, he did on the night of Imbolc." Remus put down his fork. "As I've said before, the Dark Lord likes symmetry. His resurrection was exactly a year ago on that date."

"Great." Harry really wasn't happy. "So we've now got a full strength Voldemort back on our hands."

Remus nodded. "So it would seem."

"So is Bella at Villa Laurifer?" Harry passed a piece of bacon to Hedwig, who had flown onto his shoulder.

Remus grinned. "She is, and I don't think she was too happy when she found out that I was now her counterpart."

Even with the gravity of the situation, Harry allowed himself a small smile. "Tough!" He suddenly noticed the smaller headline. "Her husband and his brother were killed. She must have been really upset about it."

"Not that I could see." Remus had seen Bella after his transformation back to his human form.

Harry looked closer at the small paragraph. "Err, Dad. It says that they appeared to have been killed by a werewolf."

"That's because I killed them." Remus poured himself a cup of tea as he told Harry.

Harry couldn't believe the calm way Remus told him. "But you don't seem bothered."

Remus took a mouthful of tea before answering. "Harry, I've learnt to live with what I've done. There are some people I regret killing but the Lestranges didn't make that list. I ran a little wild last night and they ended up dead because of it."

"But didn't you take Wolfsbane?" Harry thought that Remus should have been in control if he had.

"Yes. However, with the situation I was placed into, the bloodlust managed to overwhelm me." Remus could see that Harry didn't understand. "The Wolfsbane helps to keep me calm and docile but it doesn't completely dull my urge to kill. Last night, with blood being spilt all around me, I had to fight very hard to keep my control. Unfortunately, I failed to do so. Rodolphus got in my way and I bit him."

"But he's dead. If you'd simply bit him, he'd be like you." Harry continued eating, surprised that he still he had an appetite.

"Once the werewolf in me tasted blood, it didn't stop until it had finished what it had set out to do." Remus sighed heavily. "His brother tried to stop me and ended up the same way. Fortunately, even though I know I did it, my memory is somewhat blurred."

"How did you get off the island if you were still a werewolf?" Harry asked.

"The Dark Lord threw a portkey at me; when I awoke this morning, I was in a cell." Remus had awoken cold, bloody and tired. "I was released just after sunrise."

"Did Voldemort punish you for killing the Lestrangle brothers?" Harry wondered if that was where Remus' injuries had come from.

"No. He simply said that they were stupid to get in my way." Remus had expected to be punished, and had been surprised when Voldemort had simply shrugged off the Lestrangle brothers' deaths.

“Either my new status granted me some leeway or the Dark Lord was pleased about what I did. To be honest, I think he has a soft spot for Bella. But I can’t say for certain.”

Harry shuddered and pushed his plate away, his appetite gone. “I can say one thing for sure; the thought of them two together certainly puts me off my food.”

Remus laughed and pushed his own plate away. “That’s not a surprise.” He got up. “The pepper-up should last for a good few hours yet. Why don’t we go out into Muggle London? You can ride the London Eye.”

Harry had wanted to ride it for a long time, and happily agreed to Remus’ suggestion. “I’ll just go get my coat.”

Remus waited until Harry had closed the door before dropping his head into his hands. He was still absolutely dog-tired from the previous night, but knew that Harry needed some sort of diversion, particularly in light of what he’d just discovered, and what he’d had to go through over the last few days. Hearing Harry return, Remus lifted his head and smiled brightly as his son walked back into the room.

Villa Laurifer

Bellatrix Lestrange lay back in the bathtub. She’d spent several hours in the shower first, washing away the filth from Azkaban. Sighing, she luxuriated in the bubble filled bath. A slight knock disturbed her reverie. “Who is it?”

“Me.” A voice called out.

Bella smiled as she recognized the voice. “Come in.”

Amicus pushed open the door. “I hear condolences are due.”

Bella shrugged. “Lupin did me a favor, so don’t expect to see me in mourning. It’s not as if I really cared about him or his brother.”

Amicus wasn't surprised. "Getting to the point of why I'm really here, our Master would like you to join us for dinner tonight."

Bella smiled lazily. "I'd be delighted. After that offal they passed off as food in Azkaban, I'm looking forward to a nice meal."

Amicus grinned. "The house elves are preparing all of your favorites."

"Our Lord is too kind." Bella looked up at Amicus. "Do you have my wand or was it snapped?"

"We retrieved it from the Ministry this morning." Amicus walked over to the bathtub and handed it to Bella, perusing her features as he did so. "I presume you're going to be wearing a glamour tonight."

"And you'd presume correctly." Bella sighed. "I think it's going to take more than a few good meals to get my looks back."

Azkaban had taken its toll on Bella. Her eyes were sunken, her skin dry and cracked, and her cheekbones stood out in profile. Amicus gently squeezed her shoulder. "I've left a few nutritious potions for you on the table in your bedroom."

Bella pulled a face but knew she had little choice if she wanted to regain her former appearance. "Thanks."

Amicus walked back across the room and pulled open the door. "I'll let you finish soaking."

Bella nodded gratefully before closing her eyes as Amicus shut the door behind him.

Amicus headed out of the room smiling. He was glad to see Bella back. Contrary to the manic visage she displayed to others, he was more than aware that Bella was far from that. She was extremely intelligent, loyal, and, before Azkaban, extremely striking. After going downstairs and pushing open the door to the large ballroom, Amicus made his way across the room and out to the apparition point. He'd return later in time for dinner.

Muggle London

Kingsley Shacklebolt stood up. "Whoever killed him certainly made a mess."

Nym, who was there with her new partner Thomas, had to look away. "They certainly made sure he wasn't going to survive."

Kingsley smiled at the Muggle policeman. "Thank you, Constable. Detectives Weasley and Pium will deal with this now."

Constable Granthope closed his notebook before shaking his head. "Poor chap." He pulled out his radio and called in that he was leaving the scene. "I'll be getting along then, Chief Inspector."

"We'll take care of the paperwork from our end." Kingsley dismissed the Constable who left the house, climbed into his car and drove away.

Kingsley then obliterated the coroner who had arrived to take away the body. "You delivered the body, felt sick, and went home."

The coroner smiled hazily and left. Kingsley turned to the two Aurors. "Pium, take his body back to the Ministry. I have a feeling that he might be of interest. Weasley and I will just check to make sure we haven't missed anything."

Pium dropped a portkey onto the body before apparating away himself, leaving Kingsley and Nym together. She turned to Kingsley. "Where do you want me to check?"

"There isn't anything left to check." Kingsley ran a hand over his head. "I wanted to talk to you alone."

Nym frowned. "Have I done something wrong?"

Kingsley smiled nervously at her. "Definitely not." Now he was faced with asking her out, Kingsley suddenly found himself at a loss for words.

“Are you alright?” Nym thought that Kingsley seemed a little stressed.

“TW, I err, I...” Kingsley’s voice trailed off.

“Just tell me what’s wrong. Perhaps I can help.” Nym laid a tentative hand on Kingsley’s arm.

Kingsley decided to just spit it out. “I’d like to take you out to dinner.”

Nym was shocked. “What?”

“It doesn’t matter.” Kingsley went to turn away convinced that Nym was going to refuse.

“Whoa there.” Nym tightened her grip on Kingsley’s arm. “You just took me by surprise.”

Kingsley restated his request. “TW, I mean Nym, I’d really like to take you out to dinner.”

Nym frowned when Kingsley called her Nym. “Please stick to calling me TW. I prefer it, and yes, I’d like to go to dinner with you.”

“You would?” Kingsley couldn’t help his response.

“I would.” Nym smiled up at her former boss. “So when?”

Now that Nym had said yes, Kingsley suddenly felt a little more in control again. “Tomorrow night. I’ll apparate to your place at seven.”

“I’ll look forward to it.” Nym smiled shyly before looking around. “I think I’d better get going.”

“Me too.” Kingsley nodded before apparating away.

Nym apparated out and, once back at the Ministry, walked back to her cubicle. Pium was looking for her. “Did you find anything else?”

“Huh?” Nym asked distractedly.

"Is everything alright?" Pium had never seen Nym so unfocused before.

"Sorry, I was just thinking about the case." Nym sat down. "No, there was nothing left in the area." She smiled at her partner. "I'd better make a start on the paperwork."

Pium grinned. "I've already begun it."

Nym let out a sigh of relief. "Great, I hate paperwork."

"I know." Pium walked off to his cubicle. In contrast to Nym, he enjoyed the deskwork more than the fieldwork but knew he had to take the rough with the smooth.

At her desk, Nym decided to use the spare time to think about Kingsley. She had had no idea that he'd been at all interested in her. When they'd met up at the New Year's Ball, he'd had a few dances with her before taking her back to her parents. She'd just thought that he'd simply viewed it as doing his duty. Even though she'd said yes to dinner, she wasn't entirely sure how she felt about dating her former boss. Deciding to worry about it after they'd had dinner, Nym pulled out a sheaf of papers she'd been avoiding dealing with, and settled down to get them out of the way.

Friday night

Harry looked up at the fireplace flared up and Hermione stepped out. "Hermione, what are you doing here?"

The fireplace flared again and Severus stepped out before Hermione could answer him. "Good evening, Harry."

"Hi, Professor." Harry wasn't quite sure how to address Severus while he was at home but technically still in the midst of the school term.

Remus came marching into the hallway. "Severus, I'm glad you could make it."

Harry frowned at his Dad's serious face. "What's going on?"

"I'll explain later." Remus told Harry, before turning back to Severus. "Let's go into my study."

Harry watched puzzled as Severus followed Remus out of the hallway. He turned to Hermione and hugged her. "I didn't expect to see you until Sunday."

"Papa said that something had come up and we'd be leaving after lessons ended." She reached into the bag she had with her. "These are a copy of my notes. You can catch up with your schoolwork tomorrow."

"Thanks." Harry half-heartedly took the papers.

Hermione frowned. "Are you alright now? Professor Dumbledore said you were injured by a venomous plant, but it's more than that isn't it?"

Harry opened his mouth to deny it but then remembered what Remus had said about staying grounded. "Come into the sitting room."

Hermione followed Harry in and sat down beside him. "Don't tell me. This has something to do with Amicus doesn't it?"

"Unfortunately yes." Harry then proceeded to tell Hermione what had happened. "...and I've been practicing with Dad since Wednesday."

"You've used an Unforgivable?" Hermione was shocked.

Harry nodded. "Two actually, the Imperius and the Cruciatus curses."

"Your Dad let you practice the Cruciatus on him?" Hermione's voice rose in pitch.

"Only after I forced him to use it on me first." Harry waited for the explosion.

"Are you mad? You could have been seriously injured." Hermione was angry at both Harry and Remus.

Harry tried to get her to calm down. "Hermione, I'm fine. Dad underpowered the spell so it wouldn't hurt so badly."

"How badly did it hurt?" As her initial shock began to die down, Hermione's natural inquisitiveness began to surface.

Harry hid his smile. "It hurt worse than anything I'd ever felt before. It felt as if the pain was all there was."

Hermione grimaced. "I can't believe your Dad did that to you."

"I told him I wouldn't train if he didn't." Harry grinned. "He said I should have been in Slytherin."

Hermione couldn't help herself, she laughed. "Oh, Harry." She then pulled out a copy of Thursday's Prophet and passed it to Harry. "Your Dad was there wasn't he?"

"He was." Harry acknowledged Remus' presence. "There's something else I think you should know."

Hermione looked expectantly. "Yes?"

"You know I just told you that Dad helped me to get out Villa Laurifer?" Harry threw the paper to one side, before continuing at Hermione's nod. "Well, Dad's been promoted because of Angelus' actions towards him. Only Amicus and the Dark Lord rank above him now."

"Can't he do anything to help you then?" Hermione couldn't see a point to Remus' promotion if he couldn't help his own son.

"No. He's still subservient to Amicus and the Dark Lord." Harry slid an arm around Hermione. "I wonder what they're talking about in there."

Hermione mooched closer to Harry. "I have absolutely no idea." She yawned. "And to be honest, right now I really don't care."

The two children then fell silent as they waited for their parents to return.

In Remus' study both men sat down. Remus stared intently at Severus. "Did you do it?"

"Do what?" Severus knew perfectly well what Remus was asking about.

"Did you torture and kill Rosier?" Remus asked. "He was meant to have been accompanying us to Azkaban but never showed up."

"How could I have? I was supposed to be a werewolf all locked up safely in my manor." Severus smiled. "I heard about his death from Leo; apparently it was a human who did it, not a werewolf."

"So you did do it then." Remus deduced.

"Of course." Severus informed him. "Leo told me that Rosier had been spotted in Knockturn Alley on the day of the second task. Leo and two of his men apprehended him the same night, and took him to a safehouse. I simply joined Leo there after I'd left school on the night of the full moon."

"So Leo was part of this as well?" Remus knew that Leo had hated his brother, but he hadn't expected him to take part in his murder.

Severus shook his head. "He didn't kill Rosier, I did. Leo had personal issues he wished to discuss with his brother but nothing that amounted to murder." Sighing Severus let his mask of detachment drop. "Despite what I said when I first found out about Virginie's rape, I had no intention of killing Rosier. I was going to let the Aurors deal with him."

"What made you change your mind?" Remus could see Severus' hands shaking.

"When I questioned him about Virginie, he took great pleasure in describing to me how it had felt to rape my wife; how he'd hurt her and how much he'd enjoyed it. He said that Azkaban wouldn't hold him and, now that he knew where she was, he'd be back to enjoy what she had to offer." Severus looked down at his hands. "When he

said that, I just lost it.” Severus looked back up. “By the time I’d calmed down, he’d bled out from the wounds I’d inflicted on him.”

“What did you use?” Remus could see that Severus needed to talk about it.

“Sectumsempra.” Severus watched as Remus’ face took on a puzzled look. “It’s a curse I invented myself. I’ve only ever used on one person before.”

“What does it do?” Remus walked over to the drinks cabinet. “Firewhiskey or water?”

“Firewhiskey.” Severus smiled gratefully as he took the glass with a shaky hand. “It’s a slashing curse. If I was to use it to slice off your hand, it would never grow back.”

Remus was shocked. “That’s a nasty spell.” He tilted his head questioningly. “Who did you use it on before?”

“James Potter.” Severus looked a little embarrassed. “Do you remember the argument we had just after taking our Defense OWL?”

Remus thought back. “The cut on his face! Madam Pomfrey had a terrible time trying to heal it.”

“I was so angry at Potter that I wordlessly cast the spell. I didn’t mean to do it, but I was beyond infuriated with him at the time.” Severus took a mouthful of the firewhiskey. “Unfortunately I went a lot further with Rosier.”

Remus sat back down. “According to Dae, even Shacklebolt felt a little queasy at the sight of your work.”

“It’s not something I’m particularly proud of.” Severus sighed. “I did find out that he’s not Hermione father nor is Barty Crouch.”

“How?” Remus was intrigued about the remark about Crouch, especially as the Death Eater had now been dead for more than ten years.

"I took blood from Rosier and from Crouch senior." Severus explained. "I needed blood from either Hermione's birth father or from his father or mother."

"You can't use a sibling's blood then?" Remus watched as Severus began to relax as he discussed one of his favorite subjects, potions.

"The potion is calibrated for parents or grandparents; for some reason it doesn't work with a sibling's blood, otherwise I would have just taken Leo's blood to check on Rosier." Severus' face had become animated as he discussed the potion.

Remus was curious. "How did you get blood from Crouch senior?"

"I asked him for it." Severus smirked. "I told him that I was conducting an experiment to prove that purebloods are indeed superior to Muggleborns and halfbloods. He had no qualms about helping me out."

"I bet he didn't." Remus didn't like the man. "For someone who's such a stickler about what's right and wrong, he's certainly a hypocrite."

"Either way, at least I now know." Severus put down his glass. "Which leaves me with two possibilities for Hermione's father; Malfoy and our mystery man."

"What are you going to do about it?" Remus didn't tell Severus that he now knew that Malfoy was indeed a Death Eater, having been filled in on that fact the previous night.

"I don't know." Severus admitted. "Speaking of killing people, I noticed that the Lestranges were killed by a werewolf."

"Is Virginie alright?" Despite his words to Harry, Remus had felt bad knowing that he'd killed his friend's brothers.

"She was a little upset." Severus had been surprised that Virginie had been as upset as she was. "She'll be okay though." Severus stood up. "Isn't it time you were going?"

Remus checked the time. "You're right."

Remus made his way back into the sitting room to find Harry and Hermione curled up together on the sofa. "Harry, Severus and Hermione will be staying until we return on Monday. I'm actually going out."

Harry looked worried. "Has Voldemort called you again?"

Remus grinned. "Actually I've got a date."

Harry was surprised. "Who?"

"I'll tell you if it works out." Remus checked the time again and dashed out the room. "I'll be down to say goodnight in a moment."

This time when Remus came into the sitting room in a suit similar to the one he'd worn to the ball, Hermione kept her face blank. "Have a nice evening, Professor."

"Thanks Hermione." Remus winked at Harry. "Don't wait up for me."

"Have a nice night." Harry watched as Remus apparated away.

Severus turned to Harry. "Can I speak to you alone?"

Hermione frowned. "But..."

"Alone." Severus reiterated the word.

Harry flashed an apologetic smile at Hermione before following Severus into his father's study. "Has Dad asked you about training me?"

"We spoke it about it briefly this morning, and yes, he has." Severus indicated that Harry should sit down. "This isn't about that."

Harry was perplexed. "Then what's it about?"

“Hermione.” Severus steepled his fingers together. “I know you two have been getting more serious, and that you have offered to step in and make her the same offer Dae has.”

Harry nodded. “Dad said I could.”

“I’m grateful for that.” Severus pinned Harry down with his stare. “However, I don’t want a repeat performance of what happened in the library.”

Harry blushed. “Sorry, Sir.”

Severus could see that he was making Harry feel uncomfortable but still continued. “I spoke to Ginevra Prewett. She admitted to asking Hermione to make the potion, but claimed to have no knowledge of why it went wrong. She’s also promised not to reveal that she saw the two of you together.”

Harry looked questioningly at Severus. “Do you believe her?”

“Without using proactive Legilimency on her, I can’t say for sure.” Severus sat back. “This time I’m going to have to give her the benefit of the doubt.”

Harry still didn’t believe Ginny wasn’t culpable for Hermione’s injuries. “I’ll be more careful in future.”

“Please do.” Severus decided to stop torturing Harry. “About your training, have you decided on a dueling partner yet?”

“I think I’d like to ask Neville.” Harry informed Severus.

Severus was a little surprised at Harry’s choice. He’d expected him to pick his brother. “Why not Dudley or Draco?”

“Dudley had trouble dealing with Dad’s confession, and Draco was horrified by his Dad as well. I don’t think asking either of them is a good idea.” Harry looked across to the drinks cabinet. “Do you mind if I get a glass of water?”

Severus picked up his whiskey glass. "Not at all. Perhaps you'd like to pour me some as well."

"Are you sure you wouldn't prefer firewhiskey?" Harry asked as he took the glass.

"Not right now, but thank you." Having already had one glass, Severus wanted to keep a clear head.

Harry passed a fresh glass of water to Severus and sat back down with his own. "You looked surprised when I mentioned Neville."

Severus snorted. "The boy's afraid of his own shadow."

"I think he just needs encouraging." Harry remembered what Seville had told him. "He stood up to Potter when he insulted my sister."

Severus had forgotten about that. "Didn't he punch him or something?"

Harry nodded. "I think I'd like to ask Neville."

"Very well. I'll arrange for a detention for you both on Monday night." Severus smiled evilly. "I'm sure I can frighten Longbottom into messing up his potion."

Harry knew that Severus didn't think much of Neville. "I'm sure you can, Sir." Harry then got back onto the subject of Hermione. "I told Hermione about what had happened to me."

"What did she say?" Severus asked.

"She wasn't very pleased when she found out that Dad had put me under the Cruciatus." Harry admitted.

"Remus did that?" Severus was amazed. "I didn't think he had it in him to do that to you."

"I sort of blackmailed him into doing it." Harry reddened. "I half wish I hadn't. To say it hurt was an understatement and Dad underpowered it."

"I'd like to see what you can do tomorrow." Severus got up. "Right now I think we'd better get back to Hermione before she wonders what I've done to you."

Harry got up as well. "Pasha should be serving dinner shortly. I hope you like fish and chips."

"I've never had it before." Severus admitted. "I take it that it's a Muggle food."

Harry left the room with Severus, explaining what fish and chips were.

The Burrow

Nym waited nervously for Kingsley to appear. A knock at the door signaled his arrival. Andy went to answer it. "Kingsley, come in. Nym's almost ready."

Nym brushed down her dress as she stood up and headed for the staircase. Pasting on a smile, she made her way down the stairs. "Hi, Sir."

"I think you can call me Kingsley for tonight, TW." Kingsley smiled at Nym and held out a single yellow rose for her. "This is for you."

Nym was touched by his gesture and took it, before conjuring up a small vase with water in it. She carefully placed the rose in it before setting it on a side table. "Thank you."

"Shall we be off then?" Kingsley had booked a table for seven fifteen and didn't want to lose it by being late.

Nym kissed her mother on the cheek. "I shouldn't be too late but don't wait up for me."

"I won't." Andy smiled the pair. "Have a good evening."

“We will.” Kingsley held out his arm to Nym. “Goodnight, Andy.”

Andy didn’t have a chance to respond as the pair disappeared. Still smiling, she headed into the kitchen.

Carpe Diem

Nym entered the restaurant with Kingsley following close behind. It was somewhere she hadn’t been to before. “What type of food do they serve here?” She kept her voice low.

“Italian.” Kingsley walked up to the hostess. “I have a reservation in the name of Shacklebolt.”

The girl looked down the list. “Please follow Truman who will show you to your table.”

Kingsley put his hand at the base of Nym’s spine as they followed Truman to their table. Nym had been about to sit down when she let out an exclamation. “Oh!”

“Is something wrong with the table, Madam?” Truman looked worried.

Not wanting to upset the man, Nym shook her head. “Sorry, I just remembered something. The table’s wonderful.”

Reassured that nothing was wrong, the man pulled out a chair for her to sit down. Kingsley slid into his own seat before Truman could do the same for him. “I hope you both have a good evening. The wine waiter will be with you shortly.”

As Kingsley looked around, he could see what had caused Nym’s reaction. In a booth across the room he spotted Remus, and a woman who looked vaguely familiar, sitting together. “So you spotted Lupin?”

Nym looked embarrassed. “I just didn’t expect to see him here.”

Kingsley was about to ask her about Remus when the wine waiter arrived. Kingsley looked at Nym. "Do you prefer red or white?"

"White, please." Nym waited until the waiter had taken their order before sliding her hand across the table to cover Kingsley's own. "I'm sorry about how I reacted. Let's just forget about everyone else and have a nice meal."

Relaxing, Kingsley agreed. "So tell me..."

Across the room, Remus had noticed Nym and Kingsley arriving. His companion looked across to where he had glanced. "Do you know them?"

Remus confirmed that he did, but didn't elaborate on how. "I do. Do you?"

Lilith shook her head. "I'm afraid not. I've probably seen them come into the hospital but working there you see so many people that there aren't too many who stick in your mind." She smiled at Remus. "You, however, made an impression."

Remus smiled. "As did you."

"How is your son?" Lilith asked. "I don't remember seeing his mother visit when he was in."

Remus read between the lines. "Harry's doing just fine. His mother was at home with her husband."

Lilith smiled. "I'm glad he's fine."

Remus topped up Lilith's wine glass. "I'm surprised you agreed to come out to dinner with me if you suspected that I was married. I'm also more surprised that you didn't know who Harry was."

Lilith shrugged. "Why should I?"

Remus sounded incredulous. "Are you telling me that you don't read the Daily Prophet?"

"That rag!" Lilith shook her head. "I can't stand the paper."

Remus was a little taken aback at her vehemence. "Is there something you're not telling me?"

Lilith sighed. "I've been married before."

It was Remus' turn to shrug. "As I have but I don't..."

Lilith interrupted him. "I kept my married name of Gosford; my maiden name was Skeeter."

"Aah. I take it Rita's your sister then?" Remus asked.

Lilith nodded. "Unfortunately yes. I'm embarrassed to tell anyone. I don't even know why I'm telling you."

"I won't mention it." Remus looked up as their waiter came towards the table. "I think it's time to order."

Grimmauld Square

Harry sat in front of the fireplace watching the flames flicker as he waited for Remus to get home. Severus and Hermione had both gone to bed several hours earlier. Harry looked up as he heard a crack. Walking out into the hallway he was surprised to find a woman with his Dad.

Remus was just as surprised to find Harry still up. "Hi Harry. I thought you'd have been in bed a long time ago."

"I couldn't sleep." Harry looked expectantly at the woman.

Remus suddenly remembered Lilith. "Harry, this is Lilith Gosford. Lilith, this is Harry Lupin, my son."

Lilith held out her hand. "I'm pleased to meet you Harry."

Harry politely shook hands, trying not to recoil at how cold Lilith's hand felt." I'm pleased to meet you as well, Ms. Gosford." He turned to his Dad. "I'll be off to bed. I'll see you in the morning."

"Goodnight Harry." Remus indicated that Lilith should head into the sitting room. He smiled at Harry before following her.

Harry watched as the two of them walked away. Even though he was glad his Dad was dating again, there was something he didn't like about Lilith. However, deciding that Remus was more than old enough to take care of himself, he headed for bed.

The next morning Harry found Remus at the breakfast table eating his breakfast. "Has Ms. Gosford gone home?"

"She didn't stay the night." Remus frowned. "Would it have bothered you if she had?"

"Honestly, yes." Harry sat down. "Don't get me wrong though. It's not the thought of someone staying overnight with you, but her."

"What about her?" Remus wanted Harry's opinion.

"I didn't like her." Harry shuddered. "When I shook her hand it was cold, icy cold."

Remus laughed. "That doesn't make her a bad person."

"I'm sorry Dad but there's just something about her I don't like." Harry looked apologetically at his Dad, and changed the subject. "Where are Hermione and Professor Snape?"

"In the dueling room." Remus finished eating his breakfast and got up. "I'm going to join them now." Seeing Harry about to get up, Remus shook his head at him. "I suggest you eat something. I have a feeling you're going to need the energy."

Harry did as he was told and soon joined the others in the room. "What are we going to do today?"

"I want to get some idea of how powerful you are." Severus walked into the center of the room. "The Imperius first, I think."

Remus passed Harry his wand. Nervously Harry called out "Imperio."

Severus' eyes became glazed. Harry quickly tried to think of something that wouldn't embarrass his teacher. "Hold up one hand."

Severus started to lift his arm, only to shake his head. "Okay. Now the Cruciatus."

Hermione immediately gasped. Severus turned round to his daughter. "If you don't want to watch, then you can go back downstairs."

Hermione shook her head. "I want to stay."

"Are you sure?" Severus checked. After Hermione nodded, he turned back to Harry. "Off you go then."

Harry closed his eyes before aiming his wand. "Crucio."

Severus frowned as nothing happened. "A little more effort, I think, Mr. Lupin."

Harry scowled at Severus' use of his surname. This time he concentrated, and thought of how he'd feel if Amicus hurt Hermione. "Crucio."

Hermione had to bite her lip to stop her from gasping as she watched her father collapse under the onslaught of Harry's curse.

Harry quickly dropped the spell. "Are you okay, Professor?"

Severus didn't move for a moment but then lifted his head. "I'd forgotten how painful the Cruciatus actually is." He climbed unsteadily to his feet. "But yes, Harry, I'm okay."

Remus moved across to where Hermione was standing and slipped his arm around her shoulders. "I know this is upsetting to watch. Are you sure you don't want to do as Severus suggested?"

"I do but I don't want to leave Harry." Hermione sighed. "Why did Amicus have to pick him?"

"Didn't Harry tell you?" Remus was surprised.

"Yes." Hermione looked at Remus. "What he didn't tell me was why you're not doing this, instead of Papa. I mean, you are Harry's Dad. Harry said you'd already put him under the Cruciatus and that he'd done the same to you."

"As his sponsor, I'm supposed to but..." Remus' voice trailed off as Hermione looked puzzled.

Remus looked across to where Harry and Severus were deep in conversation. "Come with me."

Remus led Hermione out of the room. "Didn't Harry tell you that I'm his sponsor?"

Hermione shook his head. "I didn't realize Harry needed a sponsor."

Remus frowned. "Exactly what did Harry tell you?"

Hermione filled Remus in. "He told me that Amicus had taken him; that you helped him to leave Villa Laurifer, and that he'd have to become Amicus' protégé on his birthday."

"I think Harry was trying to spare you." Remus sighed. "As his sponsor I'm supposed to teach him the Unforgivables together with any other spells I think might be useful. However, even though Harry pushed me into performing the Cruciatus on him, I can't do it again. Your father is also better versed in dark magic than I am."

Hermione was a little taken aback that her father was more capable than Remus. "But why wouldn't Harry just tell me that? I mean it's nothing to be ashamed about. It's not his fault Amicus picked him."

"I think you're forgetting something about a sponsor, Hermione." Remus waited for the penny to drop.

Hermione went white and shook her head. "Please tell me he doesn't have to do that."

"I'm sorry but he does." Remus wanted to throttle Harry for putting him in this position. He'd thought that Harry had filled Hermione in on everything, especially when she'd announced that she'd be sitting in on the training. "As his sponsor, I pick his target."

Hermione backed away from Remus. "You really can't do that to him."

"As I've already told Harry, if I thought I could take Amicus down, even if it meant dying in the process, then I would. But I can't guarantee that I'd succeed. If I failed, I have no doubt that Amicus would make good on his word to Harry." Remus could see that Harry had told Hermione about Amicus' threat.

"I think I'm going to sit in my room for a while." Hermione smiled shakily at Remus. "Tell Harry I'll see him later."

Remus let her go. Pushing open the door, he walked back into the room and up to his son. "I think you forgot to tell Hermione something didn't you?"

"You didn't tell her about being my sponsor did you?" Harry looked annoyed.

"I didn't know that I wasn't supposed to." Remus snapped.

Severus looked at Harry. "Hermione didn't know?"

"Not until Dad told her, no." Harry sighed. "I was hoping I wouldn't have to tell her."

Remus shook his head. "I'd have thought that my own actions would have been enough of an example of what happens when you don't tell people things."

Harry looked down at the floor. "I just didn't want her to hate me."

“Harry, Hermione doesn’t hate you.” Remus lifted Harry’s chin. “She’s in her room. Go talk to her.”

Harry hurried out to Hermione’s room, and knocked on the door. When Hermione opened it, he could see she’d been crying. “I’m sorry I didn’t tell you. I thought you’d hate me.”

“Oh Harry.” Hermione burst into tears again and threw her arms around Harry’s neck. “I’d never hate you.”

Harry pulled her closer and held her while she cried. “I should have told you.”

Hermione pulled away, tears still streaming down her face. “You don’t have to do this alone. I’m going to help you.”

Harry shook his head. “You don’t need to.”

“Papa told me you need someone to duel with.” Hermione informed Harry.

Harry cursed Severus in his head. “I’ve already decided to ask Neville.”

“Why not me?” Hermione looked annoyed.

“For the same reason that Dad isn’t going to be training me.” Harry said softly.

“I don’t care.” Hermione was adamant. “I’m doing it.”

“I doubt very much whether your father will let you.” Harry pointed out.

“He will.” Hermione pulled a handkerchief out of her pocket and wiped her face. “In fact, let’s go talk to him now.”

Harry had little choice except to follow his girlfriend back upstairs. Severus was talking quietly with Remus. Severus frowned when he saw Hermione’s face. “What’s wrong?”

"I was upset about Harry." Hermione answered brusquely, wanting to get to the reason she'd come looking for her father. "Papa, I want to be Harry's dueling partner."

Severus shook his head. "Absolutely not."

Hermione had never before defied her father but this time she stood her ground. "I'm doing it Papa."

"But Hermione..." Harry tried to interrupt, only for Hermione to send a fierce glance his way.

"Harry needs someone he can trust. Who better than me?" Hermione argued. "I know he wants to use Neville, and I don't mean to belittle Neville, but I'm smarter, faster and better at spell work."

Severus could see that Hermione was determined. "Do you really understand what you're getting yourself into?"

"Does Harry?" Hermione countered. "He's got no more experience than I have."

Remus interrupted. "But I thought Harry was planning to ask all of the others before definitely settling on Neville."

Harry had been about to ask Remus what he was going on about, when he realized that his Dad was trying to offer him a way out of having Hermione for his partner. "I think I'm actually going to tell everyone. That way we can see who, if anyone, wants to help me."

Hermione scowled. "But I've already said I'd do it."

Severus silently thanked Remus. "I think Remus has a point. Harry needs the most challenging partner he can get for this, Hermione. It might not turn out to be you."

Hating that she'd been backed into a corner by logic, Hermione crossed her arms and sat down. "Okay, but if I end up being the most suitable person, then Harry can't disagree to my becoming his partner."

It was now Harry's turn to be stymied by logic. "Fair enough. If you're the best choice for the job, then I'll pick you, but only on one condition."

"What is it?" Hermione was still determined to do it, condition or no condition.

"That you only decide for sure after you've experienced the Cruciatus." Harry didn't want Hermione to undergo the painful curse but couldn't see any way around it if she was going to be his partner.

Hermione nodded. "I think we should get this settled right now."

Harry shook his head. "No. I'm not putting you through that for nothing; you might not be my ultimate dueling partner."

Hermione pouted a little. "Okay."

Severus checked the time. "I think you two should make sure that you've got everything ready for school. I need Harry back in this room after lunch."

Both children left the room.

Severus turned to Remus. "Thanks. I was worried for a minute that Hermione was going to become his training partner, whether I wanted her to or not."

"You do know that that might still happen, don't you?" Remus pointed out.

"Yes, but I can hope can't I?" With that, Severus headed off to his room.

Next Chapter: A new member joins the group; Harry and Severus make a final decision; Remus makes a visit to Villa Laurifer.

Chapter 48: A Decision Is Made

11th March 1995

Severus scowled as Harry climbed wearily to his feet. "You've got to put more effort into it, Harry."

Harry scowled back. "I'm doing the best I can. We've been at this for hours."

"Do you really think the Dark Lord or Amicus is going to care how long you've been at something?" Severus circled slowly around Harry. "Or that you claim you're doing the best you can?"

Harry bit back the comment that hovered on his tongue. "Fine."

"They also won't be putting up with your lip." Severus snapped. "Now get back in position, and this time at least make it look as if you're really trying."

Hermione, George and Luna all took up their positions once more, and Severus simply nodded at them. Hermione dropped to the floor while firing off a stunning spell, which Harry saw coming, and moved to avoid.

George and Luna advanced behind him, both firing off cutting curses. George nicked Harry's arm, but Luna's was sent back at her by Harry's reflective shield, catching her on the face.

As Luna cried out and stumbled, Dudley went to move forward, only for Remus to put a restraining hand on his shoulder. "She's fine."

Dudley chafed under his Dad's hand, but didn't attempt to go to Luna's aid again. By the time Luna had gotten up, Harry had taken several blows from George and Hermione, and his left arm was hanging limply. Harry sent two spells hurtling at Hermione in quick succession. Not spotting the second spell, Hermione fell to the floor unconscious. George, however, had now moved to a full frontal assault, and with both him and Luna, who had moved to stand by his side, Harry had been backed up into the wall. Knowing that he had

little time before he would be overpowered, Harry swiftly cast the Imperius curse at George, who immediately became glassy eyed. Harry told him to disarm Luna. It was now Luna's turn to find herself being attacked from both sides, and unable to overpower either boy, she soon collapsed under the onslaught.

Dudley had had enough. "For Merlin's sake, Harry, you're hurting her."

Severus turned on him. "I suggest you keep quiet, Mr. Lupin. Miss Lovegood put up a good defense but unfortunately she didn't anticipate Harry's move; neither did Mr. Weasley which is why they've both just lost."

Panting, Harry disarmed George and turned to face his brother. "The Professor's right, Dudley. If either of them had done so, then they would have easily beaten me." Harry moved over to Luna and enervated her. "Are you alright?"

Luna looked up. "I'm fine. You should get someone to heal your arm."

Harry stood there while Remus cast the requisite spell, gritting his teeth as he felt his bone slide back into place. He then pulled Luna to her feet. "I think Dudley needs to speak to you."

Luna made her way over to the spectators' section of the room. "What's up?"

"I yelled at Harry for hurting you." Dudley admitted. "I just couldn't stand here and watch while he did that."

Luna frowned and put her hands on her hips. "Dudley, for the tenth time. I'm not a fragile little flower. You've got to ignore what's going on. Harry would never really hurt me."

"I know that." Dudley protested, looking a little cowed at an angry Luna. "It's just that I..."

"I understand Dudley." Luna put a hand on his arm. "But you can't fight my battles for me. You don't see George rushing to defend Katie."

Dudley sniggered. "She'd kick his ass if he did."

"Exactly, Dudley." Luna stepped back. "In future, I think I'm going to take a leaf out of Katie's book."

Dudley scowled but got the message. "I'll keep quiet next time."

"I don't think that there's going to be a next time, Mr. Lupin." Severus moved into the middle of the room. "After seeing all of you duel over the last few weeks, I now know who is most suited to help Harry train. Remus, can I speak to you first?"

As Severus spoke quietly to Remus, Harry thought back to when he'd returned to school. He'd asked his friends to join him in the room on the first weekend they'd had free. He'd been a little surprised when all of them had agreed to help him. George, however, had pulled him aside and asked if Katie could become part of the group. A little reluctantly Harry had agreed, but was now glad that he had. Katie was not only funny but was also very talented at dueling; something Harry hadn't realized. Harry was dragged from his thoughts by Severus calling him over. "Sorry, Professor."

Harry walked over to Severus. "So who do you think is the right person to help me?"

"There are two people actually." Severus knew Harry wasn't going to be happy with his decision. "Hermione is one of the quickest at dueling, and so she'll be ideal to help you."

Harry shook his head. "I'd prefer not to use Hermione; who else?"

Severus thought about it before answering. "Luna is pretty fast on her feet but she lacks power. I'd say either Neville or Katie if you don't want to use Hermione."

"I don't." Harry didn't hear Hermione walk up behind him.

"Harry Lupin. Turn around right now." Hermione demanded.

Harry winced as he realized Hermione must have overheard his conversation with her father. "I know what you're going to say."

"I expect you do." Hermione stood with her arms folded. "You promised that if I turned out to be the best, then you'd use me. I have, and I'm going to be your partner, not somebody else."

Unable to do anything about it now that Hermione had found out, Harry nodded reluctantly. "Okay you're in, but you still haven't experienced the Cruciatus curse yet."

Hermione walked to the padded area of the room. "In that case, I'm ready to do it right now."

Draco walked over to the group. "What's going on?"

"I'm the most suited to partner Harry but he's refusing to let me do it until I know how it feels to be put under the Cruciatus." Hermione informed Draco. Harry had told the others about using the Imperius curse, but not the Cruciatus.

"What?" Draco blurted out as he swung round on Harry. "You can't do that to her. I can't see why she needs to go through that."

Harry began to explain to Draco why Hermione had to go through it. "If Hermione wants to be part of my training and learn the same spells I'm learning, she's also going to have to be able to deal with the Cruciatus as I'm going to be using it on her as part of my training. However, I'm not skilled enough to control it right now, so Dad or Professor Snape is going to have to do it this time."

Draco looked troubled. "So when are you going to undergo it?"

"I already have." Harry told him.

Draco was shocked. "Did Amicus do it?"

Harry shook his head. "No, Dad did."

Draco looked appalled and turned to look at Remus. "How could you do that to your own son?"

Severus stepped in. "Draco, if you don't want to part of this, then that's fine. You're welcome to come to the sessions and practice your dueling. However, don't judge others until you've had to do what they have. If you can't deal with this, I can always obliviate you and you can leave right now. Do you understand?"

Draco nodded. "I want to stay." He walked over to Harry. "I still can't believe you let him do it to you though."

"I didn't give him any choice." Harry defended his Dad's actions. "If he hadn't, I told him I was going to simply walk away."

Draco was surprised by Harry's words. "You'd really have just walked away, even after Amicus threatened to kill everyone?"

Harry shook his head. "No, but I needed Dad to think that."

Remus swore under his breath. "As I said then, Harry, you really should have been in Slytherin."

Severus smirked. "I think you'd have made a fine Slytherin, Harry."

Harry grinned at Severus, grateful for a little light relief. "I doubt that, but thanks Professor."

Hermione coughed politely. "I hate to break up the party but I'd really rather get on with this."

Harry could see that she was nervous as she had begun to chew her bottom lip. "Are you really sure, Hermione?"

Hermione nodded. "You're not getting out of it that easy."

Severus looked at Remus. "I can't do it."

Remus pulled out his wand, and resignedly walked over to Hermione. "I'm going to underpower this as much as I can but it's still going to hurt."

"I understand, Professor." Hermione could hear her voice shaking.

Harry had to bite his tongue to prevent himself from telling his Dad to stop.

"Are you ready?" Remus asked Hermione. At her nod, he took a deep breath and raised his wand. "Crucio."

Harry cringed as Remus cast the curse and his girlfriend crashed thrashing to the floor. As soon as Remus lifted the curse, Harry hurried over to Hermione, and dropped to his knees. "Please tell me you aren't going to do this again. You know now how much it hurts."

Shaking and pale, Hermione held up her head determinedly. "Yes it hurts, but it's nothing I can't cope with."

Remus passed over a vial of the anti-Cruciatius potion. "Take this."

Hermione swallowed it quickly. "Thanks." She looked up at Remus. "And thank you for doing that."

Remus brushed off her thanks. "I couldn't let Severus do it."

Hermione tried to get up, only for her legs to give way from under her. Remus picked her up in one fluid motion and carried her across the room, before placing her on a seat. "Take it easy for a moment."

Ignoring the others, Harry moved to stand beside her. "Hermione, please change your mind." He then took Hermione's hand as he once more dropped to his knees. "I can't bear to see you in pain like that."

"I'm doing it, Harry." Hermione put her hand on Harry's cheek. "You need me."

Harry took Hermione's hand from his face and kissed it. "I hate that you're doing it."

“Err, is there something you two aren’t telling us?” Draco interrupted the private moment.

Harry looked at Hermione, who simply nodded. “Hermione’s my girlfriend.”

“Since when?” Neville was confused. “I thought Hermione was engaged to that Venant guy.”

“I was. We broke it off some time ago but haven’t announced it formally yet.” Hermione told Neville.

George grinned. “So you finally did something about it. About time, Harry.”

Draco frowned. “George knew about you two?”

“He guessed that I liked Hermione, and tried to pressure me into asking her out last year.” Harry could see that Draco was hurt that Harry hadn’t told him. “But I wasn’t ready then. He didn’t know that I was seeing her until, like you, he found out today.”

Draco felt a little better at Harry's words. “It’s okay. I just wondered.”

Severus and Remus had both gone to talk to Frances, who had wanted to watch the dueling session. Severus walked back over to the children. “As much as I hate to say it, Hermione is going to be Harry’s main dueling partner. Neville, you’ll be his secondary partner.”

Neville’s face was picture of delight. “Thank you.”

Severus shook his head. “Believe me you won’t be thanking me after you’ve had to undergo your first training session.”

Severus’ dire warning did nothing to dim Neville’s joy at being chosen. “Do I have to undergo the same as Hermione?”

“You will.” Remus told him as he moved to rejoin the group after finishing talking to Frances. “Severus and I have already decided to

help all of you with your dueling but not with dark magic. Only Harry, Hermione and Neville will be using that.”

Dudley shook his head. “If Harry’s learning it, then I want to as well. I’d like to be just as prepared as Harry is. If we’re ever attacked, then I doubt very much whether the Death Eaters will be using light spells. I think as Harry’s friends and family we’re just as likely as he is to be exposed to an attack.”

Remus realized Dudley had a point and looked across to Severus who shrugged. “Very well. But if you decide to do this, it’s going to be hard. Dark magic is a nasty thing to mess with. If you do it, you have to promise that you’ll only do it while Severus and I are here.”

Dudley wasn’t happy about Remus’ restrictions but knew that his Dad would refuse if he complained. “Okay. So what happens now?”

George looked nervously at Remus. “I suppose this is where we find out what it feels like to undergo the Cruciatus.”

“Only if you want to learn to learn the darker spells. If you simply wish to improve your dueling skills, then no.” Remus told him. “We don’t have to do it today though.”

One by one, the children all decided that they were in. Draco swallowed hard. “I think we should get it over with.”

Severus stepped forward. “Who wants to go first?”

Draco held up his hand. “I will.”

Severus nodded towards the center of the room. “The floors already cushioned. I’ll keep the spell short and low powered. But as Remus told Hermione, even doing that, it’s going to hurt.”

Draco wondered if he’d made a mistake but gamely walked into the center of room. Twenty seconds later he was being picked up by Remus who passed him a vial of the anti-Cruciatus potion. “Does anyone want to change their mind now?”

No-one did, and ten minutes later, five more sore and shaking children had undergone the Cruciatus.

Harry, who had sat quietly with Hermione while the others had been subjected to the painful curse, turned to his friends. "I don't know what to say. I can't believe you'd all do this for me."

Still shaking slightly, Luna leant across and hugged him. "We're your friends, Harry. That's what friends do."

Harry felt his emotions bubble up and, trying to hide them, buried his head in Luna's hair before whispering quietly into her ear. "Thanks."

After pulling himself together, Harry brought up a good question. "Who's going to supervise us? I know Professor Snape only thought he'd be dealing with me and my partner."

Remus answered his question. "Because there are so many of you, Severus and I have decided to split you into two groups. I won't be involved with your training unless it's absolutely necessary as I can't place the Cruciatus on you again; the same goes for Hermione and Severus." After undergoing it, all the children understood both his and Severus' reluctance to place it on their own children. Remus continued. "I'll therefore be taking Draco, George, Katie and Hermione." Seeing Hermione's face, Remus held up a hand. "You will be dueling with Harry aside from the group sessions, but you can't expect your Dad to put you through what I'm going to." Deep down, Remus wasn't even sure he could do it her, but as Severus had agreed to train Harry, it was only fair that he dealt with Hermione. "Severus will be overseeing Neville, Harry, Luna and Dudley."

Luna wasn't happy. "I'd rather not be in Dudley's group. I'm not sure whether he will be able to attack me."

Dudley nodded. "Luna's right; I wouldn't."

Severus understood. "In that case, I'll take Katie, and Luna can move over to Remus' group."

Remus checked the time. "That's enough for today. I'll see my group on Monday night at 7.30 for detention."

"Detention?" Hermione sounded a little dismayed. "But what about my school record?"

Remus laughed. "If anyone asks, then that's what it is, but I won't enter it formally onto the records."

Hermione heaved a sigh of relief. "Thank goodness."

Harry pulled Hermione aside. "Are you alright?"

Hermione rubbed her arms. "I just feel a little tired and achy. I'm going to ask Papa if I can use his bathroom."

Harry's face lit up. "I didn't think of that. I'll ask Dad if I can use his. I could do with a soak."

Everyone left the room, Hermione following her father and Harry and Dudley both deciding to make use of Remus' private bathroom.

May 20th 1995

Harry groaned and rolled to his feet. "Bloody hell, Hermione."

Hermione stood over him. "Surprise!"

Dudley laughed at Harry's predicament. "That'll teach you not to pay attention."

Harry had been dueling with Hermione when she'd surprised him by changing into her animagus form in mid-fight. Harry had dropped his wand and collapsed to the ground as Hermione had sunk her teeth into his arm, driving him off his feet.

Severus smiled proudly. "Well done, Hermione."

Harry scowled. "When were you going to tell me that you'd actually managed to transform?"

"It wouldn't have been a surprise if I'd told you." Hermione twirled her wand around in her hand.

Harry picked up his wand before hugging his girlfriend. "Sorry I snapped but that really hurt."

"You were going to beat me." Hermione hugged him back. "I was getting a little fed up with losing."

Katie, who'd just beaten Dudley, moved to stand next to Hermione. "I think we can chalk this up to a victorious day for the girls."

Luna poked her head around the door. "Professor Lupin said to tell you guys that we're finished."

Dudley smiled happily at Luna. "How did you do?"

"Not bad." Luna grinned widely. "Actually, I wiped the floor with Draco."

The wall between the two groups magically disappeared to reveal a somewhat bloody Draco. "Your girlfriend has a vicious streak, Dudley. She conjured and released a swarm of killer fairies at me."

Harry burst out laughing. "Killer fairies?"

Luna nodded. "Yep. Like these." With a flick of her wand, a shimmering bunch of fairies appeared and shot towards Harry.

Harry let out a yelp as the fairies began to cut him. "Ouch. Ouch. Okay, okay, I give in."

Luna simply giggled. Hermione shook her head and aimed her wand at the fairies. "Immobulus."

Harry breathed a sigh of relief as the fairies became immobile. Luna then flicked her wand and the fairies disappeared.

Draco looked smug. "It's just not your day, is it Harry?"

Harry burst out laughing. "I think Katie's right about it being the girls' victory."

"Goodie." Luna plopped herself onto the large overstuffed sofa that suddenly appeared. "What do we win?"

Severus snorted. "You don't win anything."

Harry called out. "Pasha."

Pasha suddenly appeared with a huge tray of soft drinks and snacks. "I has got it ready, Master Harry."

"Thanks, Pash." Harry wished for a table, which appeared in front of the sofa. "Just put it there."

Pasha did as she was told before disappearing. The hungry children dove into the soft drinks and food.

Harry sighed. "I feel so much better now."

Luna pulled out her wand again. "I think I should heal your arm." Luna had been acting as their medic ever since she'd discovered that she had a natural aptitude for healing. Remus had been happy to teach her all the healing spells he knew.

Harry watched as the dog bite and the small cuts the fairies had inflicted on him disappeared. "Where did you find the fairy spell?"

"In a book on obscure spells." Luna smirked. "I've got plenty more where that one came from."

Draco visibly recoiled. "Do you want to share this book?"

Luna laughed. "No. I'll just surprise you."

After checking the time, Remus stood up. "I've got to go." He nodded at Severus. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Harry frowned as Remus walked out of the room. Hermione looked at him. "What's up?"

Harry pulled her to one side. "I think Dad's seeing that woman again."

"Harry, you've only met her once." Hermione couldn't believe that Harry was being so negative about someone he barely knew. "She might be alright once you get to know her."

Harry shook his head. "I doubt it." He slid his arm around Hermione. "Are you still coming to Hogsmeade with me tomorrow?"

"Of course." Hermione snuggled closer to Harry. "Bas and Livvy would kill me if I didn't fill their orders."

"I've got to do the same for Auri." Harry informed her.

Dudley joined in the conversation. "And I've promised to get Georgie some sugar quills." Dudley shook his head. "I've never known anyone get through so many."

Severus got up and quietly left the room. He really didn't want to sit in on adolescent chatter about Hogsmeade visits.

The Leaky Cauldron

Remus finished his beer. "I've got to go Dae. I'm meeting Lily in a few minutes."

Dae raised an eyebrow suggestively. "Oh yes?"

"Don't be stupid." Remus lowered his voice. "It's about my Dark Mark."

"Well let me know how it goes." Dae rubbed his arm. "I'd like to be rid of this thing."

"I will." Remus stood up.

Dae raised his eyebrow again. "You're a bit dressed up for a meeting with Lily, aren't you?"

"I've got a date afterwards." Remus smiled. "A nurse from St. Mungo's."

"I know quite a few of the nurses from there; who is she?" Dae asked curiously.

"Lilith Gosford." Remus watched as Dae's face dropped. "Spit it out."

"She's bad news, Remus." Dae informed his friend. "Do you have any idea who her sister is?"

Remus nodded. "Actually I do. She told me on our first date."

"And you're not bothered by it?" Dae asked.

"Not particularly; should I be?" Remus sat back down.

"Where do you think Rita gets her scoops from on hospital patients?" Dae asked.

"Lilith said she loathed what her sister did." Remus frowned. "Don't tell me she was lying."

"I'm afraid so." Dae swallowed the last of his beer. "She's Rita's main link to the hospital."

"How do you know this?" Remus asked.

Dae looked a little uncomfortable. "It's surprising what comes out when you're in bed with someone. However, I finished with her just before I became engaged to Hermione."

"Great." Remus looked a little dismayed. "I finally meet someone I actually quite like and I find out that she's not only slept with my best friend, but she's also the gossip queen for St. Mungo's."

"Are you still going to see her?" Dae looked at the time and got up.

"I think so." Remus stood back up as well. "I'd at least like to give her the benefit of the doubt."

"It's been some time since I saw her last. Perhaps she's changed." Dae's face told Remus that he thought differently. "I think you'd better go, or you'll be late."

"I'll be in touch." Remus shook hands with his friend before heading off.

The Ministry of Magic

Remus made his way into the Ministry only to find Leo coming out. "I didn't expect to see you here."

"I had something I needed to check on." Leo seemed a little a distracted.

"Is everything alright?" Remus asked.

Leo nodded. "Fine. I've got to get back. I'm supposed to be covering this evening."

"I'll see you later then." Remus wondered what was up with friend. He quickly made his way up to Lily's office. "I thought you were supposed to be working from home. I was a little surprised to get your owl asking you to meet me here."

"I told Sirius I'd forgotten some papers." Lily got up to hug Remus. "I need to take a look at your Dark Mark again."

Remus closed and locked the door, before stripping off his upper clothing and turning to face the wall. "Have you made any real headway since we last spoke?"

"Quite a bit actually." Lily winced as Remus flinched under the spell she was trying. "Sorry."

"It's okay." Remus wished he could see what she was doing.

"That's it for the moment." Lily stepped back. "You should find that your summons are now a lot less painful."

Remus was surprised. "How did you do it?"

"Trade secret." Lily grinned before becoming serious. "I've got something for you."

Remus watched as Lily unlocked her drawer and pulled out two wands. "I can't believe you've got them done already."

"Where my son's concerned, I'll do anything and everything I can to make sure he doesn't have to suffer." Lily passed over the wands. "I know they look identical but if you look at the tip of both of them, you'll see a slight difference in the wood."

Remus looked. "I can see. Which is which?"

"Harry's wand for practice dueling is the lighter tipped wand." Lily informed him. "I think you should get dressed."

Remus looked down. "Sorry, I was more interested in the wands than in the way I looked." He quickly pulled on his clothes before unlocking the door.

Lily had been about to ask about Harry when Sirius knocked and pushed open the door. "Remus, I didn't expect to see you here."

"I've got a date and dropped by to see if Harry's new dueling wand was ready." Remus held out one of the wands that Lily had passed to him.

"What's the other one for?" Sirius looked over the wand before passing it back.

"It's for Hermione." Remus watched as Sirius frowned.

"Why does she need another wand?" Sirius asked.

“She’s Harry’s dueling partner.” Remus explained. “After Severus tested a few of the other children against Harry, Hermione was most suited to dueling with him.”

“Is she any good?” Sirius down on the edge of the desk.

“Actually she’s not bad.” Remus had been surprised at the amount of power Hermione had been able to muster. “She’s not quite in Harry’s league but she’s mastered most of the spells she’s tried pretty much first time.”

“Do you want to join us for dinner?” Sirius got up.

Remus shook his head. “I can’t. I’ve got a date.”

“Anyone we know?” Sirius asked interestedly.

Remus nodded. “You should do. Lilith Gosford.”

Remus grimaced as Sirius pulled a face. “What’s wrong with her?”

“I thought she was pretty nice when I first met her but it turned out she was simply interested in befriending me in order to get to meet Jamie.” Sirius looked sympathetically at his friend. “I’d be careful with that one.”

Remus sighed. “I’d best be off. I’m expecting her in a few minutes.”

Lily and Sirius bade Remus goodbye and watched as he walked out of the office.

Grimmauld Square

Remus waited for the fireplace to ping to let him know that someone was waiting. After allowing her entrance, Remus stepped back to assist Lilith out of the fireplace.

Lilith brushed herself off before kissing Remus. “Something smells nice.”

Remus held out his arm. "I hope you're not vegetarian."

Lilith shook her head. "I'm afraid I love my meat too much to give it up."

Remus led Lilith into the dining room. "I'll be back in a moment. I'm going to fetch the wine."

"Don't you have house elves to do that for you?" Lilith asked.

"I do." Remus called out as he left the room. "But I prefer to do it myself."

Remus quickly returned with an open bottle of red. "I like to let it breath before serving."

Lilith accepted the glass of wine before putting it down and getting up. "Do you think dinner could wait?"

If Remus hadn't been told about Lilith earlier, he'd have taken her up on her obvious invitation. "The appetizer's a soufflé, so unfortunately not."

Lilith pouted slightly but graciously sat back down. "So tell me, how are things at Hogwarts?"

Remus wondered if Lilith was trying to find out something specific or whether she was genuinely interested. "Same old, same old."

"How's Harry doing?" Lilith pushed her soufflé around the plate.

"Very well." Remus also didn't really have much of an appetite.

"Does he get on well with Jamie?" Lilith put down her fork.

"He does, why?" Remus gave up the pretence of eating.

"I just wondered how Jamie must have dealt with finding out that Harry was the heir to the Potter fortune, and not him. I thought that

perhaps he might be a little resentful.” Lilith looked interested in Remus’ answer.

“He was glad to find Harry alive.” Remus picked up his wine glass and stared over it at Lilith. “I thought you didn’t know who Harry was.”

“I looked him up when you said that you were surprised I didn’t.” Lilith frowned. “Is something wrong?”

“I don’t know, you tell me.” Remus took a mouthful of his wine. “I had a drink with a friend before I came here.”

Lilith looked confused. “Why should that have anything to do with whether anything is wrong?”

“He told me some interesting things about you.” Remus put down his wine glass.

“Who is he?” Lilith pushed aside her dinner plate.

“Dae Venant.” Remus watched as recognition bloomed on Lilith’s face.

“I shouldn’t necessarily believe anything he tells you about me. Our split wasn’t exactly amicable.” Lilith picked up her wine and tried it. “Nice wine.”

“Thank you.” Remus leant back against his chair. “If I wasn’t such good friends with Dae, then I might have been inclined to take your side. However, we’ve been best friends for a long time now.”

Lilith sighed. “What did he tell you?”

“That you’re actually Rita’s main contact in St. Mungo’s.” Remus hoped that Dae was wrong.

“So what if I am?” Lilith looked Remus directly in the eye. “I don’t see what it’s got to do with us.”

“You’re suddenly very interested in Harry and Jamie. How do I know that you’re not just using me to get a story on them?” Remus got up and walked over to stand by the fire.

“You don’t.” Lilith also got up and walked over to where Remus was standing and put her hand over his.

Remus’ main thought when she placed her hand over his was that Harry had been right about how cold it was. “Can you honestly tell me that you didn’t make it patently clear that you were interested in me because you wanted to know more about the Boy Who Lived?”

Lilith didn’t meet his eyes. “I can’t.” She looked back up. “I admit I first accepted your invitation to dinner because I thought I could find something out. But after our second date, I knew that I really liked you.”

Remus pulled his hand free. “And I you. However, I think it might be better if you left.”

“If I was honestly that interested in pursuing a story on the Boy Who Lived, I could simply have talked to his stepfather. It’s not exactly a big secret that Healer Black’s his stepfather.” Lilith pointed out.

“I forgot to mention that I’m also good friends with Sirius Black. He mentioned your friendly overtures as well.” Remus stepped away from Lilith.

Lilith had the good grace to blush. “Look Remus, I really do like you. What do I have to do to prove it to you?”

Remus gave her an unsavory option. “You could swear on your magic that you’ve got no malicious intent.”

Lilith burst out laughing. “You’ve got to be joking.”

“I’m not.” Remus motioned towards the door. “You see, after what I’ve been told, and what you’ve just told me, I’m not exactly going to trust you, am I?”

"I suppose not, and I'm not going to be swearing to anything on my magic." Lilith pulled her robe around her. "Sorry it didn't work out."

"I'll see you out." Remus led the way to the main fireplace in the hallway.

Lilith hesitated for a moment before stepping in the fireplace. "Goodnight."

Remus didn't answer and turned away as the fireplace flared green and Lilith disappeared.

June 17th 1995 - Villa Laurifer

Remus apparated into the room off the ballroom, and made his way to Voldemort's antechamber. Once inside he knelt before his master. "You summoned me, my Lord?"

"You can get up, Remus. You may also remove your mask." Voldemort opened a side door. "Come through."

Remus was surprised to find the Malfoys there, both unmasked. "Lucius, Petra, good evening."

"Hello, Remus." Petra walked over to Remus and planted a kiss on his lips. "It's good to see you."

Lucius pulled a face at wife before shaking Remus' hand. "Remus."

Remus wasn't surprised to find that Amicus was wearing his three-quarter mask. Judging from the smells coming from the dining room, it appeared that everyone was about to eat dinner. "Amicus." Remus politely inclined his head.

"I see Petra is still after you." Amicus couldn't resist teasing Remus.

Remus looked across to where the very shapely Petra was talking to Voldemort. "As much as I'm tempted, I'm not going to anger Lucius by sleeping with his wife."

"I don't think Lucius cares. His wife has provided him with the requisite heir and a back-up. Anyway, Lucius has had a mistress for almost as long as he's been married to Petra, and she knows it." Amicus informed Remus.

Remus was stunned. "I didn't know."

"He's very discreet; something we can't accuse the lovely Petra of." Amicus watched as Petra flirted happily with the Dark Lord.

"I still think I'll pass." Remus took a glass of wine from the house elf which had appeared at his arm.

Amicus looked across the room as Bella walked in. "If you'll excuse me."

Remus watched as Amicus joined Bella, laughing at something she said. Voldemort came to stand next to Remus. "I expect you want to know what's going on?"

"I have to own to being a little at a loss, my Lord." Remus admitted.

"Rosier showed me that I can't afford to have dissension in the Order. His death left something of a gap. I thought I'd host a dinner to introduce everyone to my newest recruit." Voldemort nodded towards the door. "Perhaps you'd like to make your way in."

Remus walked into the room, failing to hide his shock at the person sitting at the table.

Chapter 49: The Third Task

23rd June 1995

Harry stood nervously before the large maze which had been grown in place of the quidditch pitch. Jamie looked a little green but still smiled encouragingly at Harry.

Harry wondered what was up with his twin but all thoughts of his brother went out of his head as Barty Crouch stood on the dais that had been assembled in front of the maze.

Crouch cast sonorous and turned to the crowd. "The Champions need to traverse the maze set out behind us. The winner will be the one who manages to take the cup and bring it back here. The Champions will go in the following order: Mr. Krum, Mr. Potter, Mr. Lupin and finally Miss Delacour."

Crouch then turned to the Champions. "As with the previous task, if you run into trouble, then you must shoot red sparks into the air. Hold tight and someone will come and collect you."

Harry gently cradled the tube of Euphorbia sap, and wondered why he actually needed it. He then watched as first Viktor, and then Jamie, entered the maze. Finally the bell sounded and it was his turn. Harry took one last look at the crowd behind him before heading into the maze. Four small arrows pointed in different directions. Taking the one marked with the Ravenclaw insignia, Harry plunged further into the maze.

Harry wasn't entirely surprised to find a table set up with potions ingredients. After scanning the available ingredients laid out on the table, Harry hurriedly lit a fire beneath his cauldron and added distilled water. Within a minute, the water was boiling. After removing the cauldron from the heat, Harry carefully selected the ingredients he wanted and dropped them into the cauldron. Finally he poured out the milk sap from the vial, taking care not to get any on his skin. As he spent a few minutes waiting for the potion to cool, Harry scanned what was left on the potions table. Deciding it couldn't hurt, he slipped the remaining potions ingredients into his pocket. After checking that

the potion was now ready, Harry carefully poured it into a fresh vial, charmed it unbreakable, and slipped it into his pocket before moving around the table and onwards.

Harry hadn't gone far when he encountered what he at first thought was a Dementor. However, he soon realized that, in contrast to the second test, this was indeed a Boggart. Shaking his head and muttering about having no originality, Harry easily dispatched the Boggart before continuing on his way.

He eventually came to a fork in the maze. Picking the left hand side he soon found that he wished he hadn't. "Oh crap." Harry turned round to go back only to find a hedge had grown up behind him.

"Oh crap, indeed, young wizard." The lion's head of the Chimaera echoed Harry before opening its mouth wide.

Harry ducked as flames shot forth from the lion's mouth, and he quickly cast a water spell which, instead of dousing the flames, only succeeded in angering the Chimaera as it shook its head free of the water droplets.

Hastily Harry backed up against the hedge behind him, and unholstered his wand to send up red sparks. Just before he did, Harry suddenly remembered one of the earliest legends in wizarding history that Remus had recounted and, rummaging in his pocket, felt for the lead pellets which he'd picked up from the potions table. It was then that he noticed the snake that formed the Chimaera's tail swaying in front of him. Harry was a little surprised; he'd expected a simple dragon's tail. The snake danced around. "Let me bite him."

"You don't want to bite me." Harry responded as he palmed the lead pellets.

The snake was fascinated. "A speaker of tongues."

The lion simply growled and threw flames at Harry again, this time catching the side of his face making Harry cry out. "You're going to die, young wizard."

Harry was now grateful for his dueling training, dropping and rolling out of the way as a huge claw swiped at him. As the lion opened its mouth once more, the snake hissing encouragement to it, Harry threw the lead pellets he had in his hand into the lion's mouth. The lion's head screamed in agony as its breath melted the lead, liquefying it and burning a path down into the Chimaera's stomach. Harry watched sickened as the creature's three heads thrashed around before it crashed to the ground dead. Harry moved warily around it and continued on his way. He couldn't believe that the school had not only allowed such a dangerous creature anywhere near one of them, but that he'd been forced to kill it.

Harry steadily made his way through the maze, smiling as he left an enraged pack of Cornish pixies floating immodible in mid-air, until he finally came to a solid stone wall. On closer inspection Harry realized that the wall was actually made up of hundreds of small stone blocks, each one of which had a different pictograph on it. Harry frowned as he tried to work out exactly what they meant. Suddenly he spotted an eagle on one of the blocks that made up the wall; however pressing it did nothing. Looking more carefully at the wall, Harry then spotted a wolf which he also pressed, again to no avail.

As he searched the small blocks, he eventually realized that certain symbols had meaning to him. Pressing one of a quill, he winced as small spikes shot out and imbedded themselves in his hand. Harry knew immediately that they were filled with some sort of poison, as his hand began to tingle. Not wanting to give up, he continued pressing symbols, making a few more mistakes, before pressing the tenth symbol, that of a full moon, which caused the wall crumbled away. Losing feeling in the whole of his arm, Harry pulled off his ring. "I hope this works." He then swallowed it, feeling relieved as it shrank quite a bit as it touched his mouth. Harry let out a sigh of relief as the tingling in his arm began to dissipate.

Now that his immediate concern had been dealt with, Harry wondered how the other Champions were getting on. No sooner had the thought crossed his mind, when a scream rang out from his right. Harry recognized the sound as coming from Jamie. Pulling out the vial of potion he'd brewed, Harry dripped it over the hedge separating him from his twin. Harry stepped back as he watched the bush

contort and retract backwards, eventually leaving a hole large enough for him to step through.

He found Jamie lying on the floor, a large three headed snake towering over him. Harry pulled out his wand, and hissed at the creature. "Get away from him."

The snake spun on Harry before its second head hissed at him. "He's mine."

Harry scowled. "I said let him go."

The snake didn't bother answering and darted back down towards Jamie again.

Harry swiftly took aim. "Reducto."

Jamie cringed as he was covered in small pieces of snake and blood. "Gross."

Harry ignored Jamie's comment and held out a hand to him to pull him up. "Are you alright?"

Once he was back on his feet, Jamie turned his face so that Harry could see the right side of it. "It bit me."

Harry immediately cast a freezing spell on the bite. "I'm not sure how long this will stop the poison from spreading for. You should send up red sparks for help."

Jamie shook his head. "I'm going on."

Harry couldn't believe his brother. "Don't be so sodding stupid. That was a Runespoor. If you don't get help now, you're going to end up dead."

Jamie simply pointed. "Look."

Harry turned to see what Jamie was pointing at, only for a sound to alert him that his brother had moved. Looking down, Harry saw that

Jamie was now on his knees. "For Pete's sake." Harry slipped his arm around Jamie's waist and, after pulling him onto his feet, supported him the last fifteen feet towards the Cup. "If you want it so badly, then just take it."

With most of his weight on Harry, Jamie reached out to grab the Cup, only to pull back his hand at the last second. "Together, let's take it together."

Harry double-checked that this was indeed his brother standing next to him, before shaking his head. "I don't need or want the limelight."

"If you don't take it, then neither will I." Jamie could feel himself getting woozy as he spoke.

Just wanting for it to be over and for Jamie to get help, Harry sighed. "Very well. On the count of the three."

As Harry said three, the two boys reached out and each grabbed a handle. Harry swore as he felt a recognizable tug behind his navel.

Stumbling as he landed, Harry looked up as screams reached his ears, only to let out a sigh of relief as he realized that they were back at the start of the maze, and the screams were coming from the delighted Hogwarts students.

Standing close by, Remus spotted Harry's predicament straight away and rushed forward. "What happened to him?"

Jamie was now unconscious, and Harry was struggling to hold him up. "Runespoor."

Cho pushed through the crowd. "What have you done to him, Lupin?"

Harry snapped at the girl. "I haven't done anything, Chang."

Remus took Harry's burden from him. "Five points from Ravenclaw, Miss. Chang. Now get back to your seat and sit down. I need to get Jamie to Madam Pomfrey." Remus then practically ran to the tent that was set up on the side of the pitch.

Poppy glanced over as Remus came through the flap. "What happened to him?"

"Harry said it was a Runespoor." Remus laid Jamie on a bed.

Poppy sounded angry. "I don't know why the Headmaster allowed such a nasty thing as a Runespoor into the tournament."

Wanting to check on his brother and escape from the attention, Harry didn't hesitate and hurried after his Dad. He was just in time to catch Poppy's comment. "A Runespoor was nothing. You should have seen the Chimaera I had to fight."

Remus blanched. "Please tell me that you're joking."

Harry shook his head. "It's dead, Dad."

Remus pulled open the tent flap. "I'll speak to you later."

Poppy finished administering the antidote to Jamie. "He'll be fine in a few minutes." She then noticed Harry's face. "Come here, Mr. Lupin. That burn needs treating."

Harry gratefully received Poppy's ministrations, and sighed in relief as the thick salve she applied soothed his heated face. "Thanks, Madam Pomfrey."

Poppy passed him a container. "You need to apply this twice more to make sure that there's no scarring. It shouldn't be too painful now that I've treated it."

Harry watched as Jamie groaned. "Hey, Potter, you alright?"

Jamie sat slowly up. "My entire body feels as if it's been trampled by a hippogriff."

Poppy frowned sternly at him. "I'm not surprised. The venom had spread throughout most of it. You'll feel fine in a few hours."

Poppy helped Jamie up off the bed just as Lily came rushing into the tent and flew over to Jamie to enfold him in her arms. "Honey, are you alright?"

Jamie's voice sounded muffled; his face pushed against Lily's shoulder. "I'm fine Mum. Harry rescued me."

Lily let Jamie go and walked over to Harry to hug him as well. "You're hurt."

"It's nothing." Harry brushed off his mother's concerns. "Jamie was worse. He got bitten by a Runespoor."

Lily scowled. "It's bloody preposterous what they've put you through."

Sirius entered the tent at a far more leisurely pace. "Jamie, I see you're alright."

Jamie's face brightened at the sight of Sirius and turned his face towards his Dad. "Madam Pomfrey's healed it now, but I got bit by a Runespoor."

Harry pulled a face at his brother's obvious delight in receiving a 'war wound' during the tournament. "What he's failing to tell you is that he didn't want to send up red sparks for assistance; he decided to go for death and glory."

Sirius shrugged off Harry's obvious annoyance with his brother. "It's exactly the sort of thing that we Marauders would have done if we'd had the chance." Noticing that Harry still didn't look entirely happy, Sirius slung his arm around his shoulders. "Relax, Harry. You're both fine, and you won the victory for Hogwarts."

Jamie grinned at his Dad. "Harry didn't want to take the Cup. He helped me up to it and told me to take it."

Lily slid an arm her son to support him as he made his way across to where Sirius had transfigured one of the beds into a sofa. "Sit there, and tell me all about it."

Harry listened as Jamie told Lily about the potion he'd had to make. Jamie's hadn't been a plant killer; he'd ended up brewing a form of solidifying potion, which he'd had to use when the ground in front of him had turned out to be quicksand. Jamie had also had to battle a Boggart.

Lily giggled as Harry once more complained about the lack of creativity shown by the organizers. "What did your Boggart become Jamie?"

Jamie shook his head. "I'd rather not say."

Harry was now curious as to what Jamie's biggest fear was. "Mine turned into a Dementor."

Jamie didn't tell them that his biggest fear had been himself, and he continued with his recitation. "After getting rid of the Boggart, I came across a Sphinx which asked me a riddle."

Harry visibly started at the mention of the Sphinx; he knew from his dreams that that was what the other Harry had had to face.

Lily frowned. "Are you alright?"

Harry rubbed his leg. "Just a bit of cramp."

Lily relaxed. "So what happened then?"

Jamie shuddered. "I walked around the corner and ended up facing a huge snake with three heads. I wasn't quick enough to draw my wand and the middle head bit me on the face; I lost my footing and ended up flat on my back on the floor. I let out a yell."

Harry sniggered. "It was more like a girl's scream; I thought I was going to have to rescue Fleur Delacour."

Jamie glared at his brother. "Up yours, Lupin."

"Jamie!" Lily wasn't happy with Jamie's attitude. "Don't be so rude to Harry; he was only joking."

Jamie went red. "Sorry Mum." He looked over at Harry. "You can continue the story."

"There's not really much to tell. I blew up the snake, helped Jamie over to the Cup, we argued and then we took it." Harry didn't mention the Chimaera; he didn't want Lily having a meltdown.

Barty Crouch's head appeared around the tent flap. "Glad to see you boys are both okay. We need you out here."

Harry didn't move. "I'd rather not."

Sirius pulled him off his feet. "Come on Harry, everyone's obviously waiting out there to congratulate you two boys."

Knowing he had little choice, Harry followed Barty Crouch out of the tent, Jamie close behind him. Suddenly Jamie reached out and grabbed his arm before drawing to a halt. "Harry, I know we don't always get along, but I wanted to say thanks for saving me."

Harry was a little stunned by Jamie's friendly overture. "I've have done it for anyone."

"I know that but I still wanted to say thank you." Jamie then resumed walking towards the stands where the entirety of Hogwarts was cheering loudly.

A few hours later, Harry flopped onto a bench. "I can't believe everyone's still celebrating."

Dudley had followed Harry to where a few of the other students had tried to escape from the noise of the celebrations. "What do you expect? The first Triwizard Tournament in years and Hogwarts wins it."

Goldstein, who was sitting on the table next to them, scowled at the pair. "Big deal. Lupin rode on his brother's shirt tails to get the trophy."

“Potter would be dead if Harry hadn’t helped him.” Dudley argued. “Harry should have been the only winner.”

“Yeah right.” Goldstein sneered. “Believe what you want to, Lupin. Everyone else knows the truth.”

“Goldstein, you weren’t there so you have no idea what the truth is.” Jamie’s voice interrupted the conversation. “Harry could have won on his own if he hadn’t stopped to help me.”

Goldstein’s mouth fell open. “But…”

“Goodnight, Harry.” Jamie slung his arm around Cho’s shoulders and led her away.

Dudley looked at Harry. “Are you sure that’s your brother?”

Harry nodded. “He’s been a lot friendlier over the last few days. I’ve no idea why though.”

“You’ve got company.” Dudley smiled at the newcomers. “Come to say congratulations to your brother?”

Cassie grinned. “Hi Dudley. Hi Harry. Isn’t it great that Mum and Dad brought me with them to watch the last task?”

Harry pulled his sister down beside him. “Are you enjoying Hogwarts?”

Orion giggled. “She should be; she’s pestered everyone she’s come into contact with, including Filch.”

“I only stopped to pet his cat.” Cassie protested.

“Did he hurt you?” Harry knew how Filch felt about him, and was worried that his dislike of Harry might have transferred over to his sister.

“No.” Cassie looked confused. “He was very nice to me, and said that I could see Miss Rumples whenever I wanted to once I start school.”

"That's a first." Dudley told Cassie. "Filch usually tells students to get lost."

"I didn't know." Cassie looked worried. "Do you think I shouldn't visit him when I come back?"

"I'm sure you'll see Miss Rumples a great deal." Harry reassured his sister. "Why don't we go and sit by the bonfire?"

Cassie gladly took Harry's hand and led him to where her parents were sitting by the huge bonfire made up of the hedges that had formed the maze.

Sirius pulled Cassie onto his lap. "So Harry, how did you enjoy being the hero of the hour?"

"I hated it." Harry admitted. "I really wish I'd just let Jamie take the Cup on his own."

"I'm glad you didn't." Lily was pleased that her twins finally seemed to be getting along.

"So what plans do you have for the holidays?" Sirius tickled Cassie as he asked.

"I'm spending the first month with Dad." Harry told him.

"Just you?" Lily was surprised.

Harry shook his head. "All of us."

"Are you excited about your soon-to-arrive brother?" Lily asked.

Harry's face lit up. "I am. Mum said in her last letter that she felt ready to pop now. It's why Dad's looking after us for most of July; to give Mum and Uncle Grim a chance to have some time alone with the new baby when he arrives."

"When will you go stay with your mother?" Sirius had stopped tickling Cassie, who promptly settled herself more securely on her Dad's lap before leaning back against him.

"A few days before my birthday. Mum wants to hold a party for both Dudley and me." Harry shook his head. "But I think she's probably going to be too tired."

"I'll hold a party for you both." Lily offered, before remembering exactly why that wasn't a good idea.

Thankfully Harry took the decision out of her hands. "I don't really want one to be honest; neither does Dudley. We were hoping that Mum wouldn't force one on us."

On the far side of the pitch, Hermione stood with Luna watching the Blacks and Harry. "I really want to go over and talk to Harry but I can't while he's over there."

"You really don't like Sirius Black do you?" Luna observed as she sipped her lemonade through a glass straw.

"Not particularly." Hermione admitted. "I am trying though, as Harry really thinks a lot of him."

"So how are you and Harry?" Luna asked interested.

"We're doing well. Actually we're doing really well." Hermione blushed. "Luna, I think I'm in love with him."

"Even though he's beating you in your dueling sessions on a regular basis?" Luna knew how competitive Hermione was, and couldn't resist teasing her friend.

"Even with that." Hermione grinned at Luna. "Anyway, we'll see who's beating who when we get our test results in at the end of the year."

"I don't envy you guys." Luna had watched as Harry, Dudley and Draco had studied late into the night for their exams. "It's only going to get harder next year with your OWLs coming up."

Hermione actually looked excited. "I can't wait."

Luna enjoyed studying but not to the extent that Hermione seemed to. "I can."

The two girls stopped talking as Dumbledore's voice suddenly cut through their conversation. "I'd like to thank everyone who came today and Mr. Potter and Mr. Lupin for bringing the victory to Hogwarts. But I'm afraid that it's time for the celebrations to end, so if all students could make their way back to their houses where you'll find a light supper waiting for you. Thank you."

Hermione sighed. "I didn't really get to talk to Harry all night."

"At least it's Saturday tomorrow. You can talk to him then, when he's kicking your ass in the dueling room." Luna laughed at Hermione's annoyed face.

"We'll see." Hermione picked up her cloak after the table. "We'd better get in."

Over in the stands Harry hugged Lily, Sirius and Cassie before the three of them headed off towards the gates.

Remus appeared behind Harry. "Are you going back to Ravenclaw, or do you want to come and stay with me?"

Harry grinned. "With you. I have a horrible feeling that the partying will be going on for quite some time yet."

"That's what I thought." Remus put an arm around Harry's shoulder and led him away.

Once in his room, Remus passed a bottle of Butterbeer to Harry. "You're allowed one celebratory drink."

Harry took a long draught from the bottle. "That's good." He then looked at his Dad. "Did you find about the Chimaera?"

Remus sat down. "I did. Apparently it was Percy Weasley's idea for you to face it. It was supposed to have asked you a riddle, not attacked you. I think the Ministry is going to have some fun trying to explain to the wizard who owned it why their prize pet is now dead."

Harry didn't really care what the Ministry was going to have to do. "It serves them right. I didn't know what else to do when it attacked me. Luckily I picked up some of the potions ingredients from the table when I completed my potion. I was even luckier that you'd told me about the legend of the Chimaera and Bellerophon."

Remus was amazed. "But I told you that ages ago."

"I just remembered how Bellerophon had killed it, and tried copying it. I'm just thankful it worked, and that Severus' lessons helped me." Harry put down the bottle. "I didn't dare try any of the dark magic spells that I knew, but if it had come down to it, I probably would have if I'd had to."

"I'm glad you didn't have to. How did you cope with the rest of the obstacles?" Remus drank his tea while he listened to Harry's discourse on how he'd got through it.

"I just wish I'd forced Jamie to take the Cup on his own." Harry yawned. "I don't know what was up with him. I half expected him to simply take it when I told him to."

"He is getting older; maybe he's simply becoming more mature." Remus suggested.

"I don't know." Harry got up. "Sorry, Dad but I'm beat. I'll see you in the morning."

Remus hugged his son. "Goodnight Harry."

Frances watched as Harry closed the door. "So Remus, it looks as if we have a new Champion."

“A reluctant Champion.” Remus reminded her. “Do you fancy a chat? I’m not really ready to go to sleep yet, and I could do with some stimulating conversation.”

“You can always move me into the bedroom to talk.” Frances winked at Remus.

Remus laughed out loud. “Are you flirting with me, Frances?”

“An ugly old thing like you?” Frances snorted. “I wouldn’t be so desperate.” She then smiled saucily at him. “Of course I’m flirting with you. You try spending as long as I have in a portrait, and you’d soon realize that you have to make your own fun.”

Remus swung the portrait down from the wall. “Let me just get changed, and I’ll hang you up in my room.”

Frances pouted. “Spoilsport.”

Remus just laughed and went into his room before closing the door. A few minutes, clad in his pajama bottoms and a t-shirt, he came back out to retrieve the portrait.

“About time.” Frances grumbled.

Remus just smiled. “Let’s get you on the wall.”

After hanging Frances up, Remus grabbed his cup of tea from the sitting room, before walking back in the bedroom and closing the door.

2nd July 1995

Harry looked down at the parchment that he’d just been handed by Professor Flitwick. He grinned. “Yes!”

Over on the Slytherin table, Hermione groaned. “Drat.”

Auri who had a similar parchment in her hand looked over to her friend. “What’s wrong Hermione?”

“Harry got top ranking this year.” Hermione looked disappointed.

“Where were you?” Auri folded up her own parchment to take home to her parents.

“Second.” Hermione’s voice was dismal, reflecting her frustration. “How did you do?”

“Sixth; Georgie finished eighth.” Auri was pleased with her ranking. “I’m just glad exams are over and that we’re going home tomorrow.”

“Me too.” Hermione smiled as Livvy raced alongside the table to her. “Hermie, I finished first in my year; Orion Black was second.”

Hermione scowled at her sister. “Please don’t call me Hermie.”

Livvy’s face dropped, and she turned away. Hermione grabbed at her arm. “Sorry, Liv. I’m just a little disappointed. Harry beat me.”

Livvy was confused. “But I thought Harry was your friend.”

“He is, but I still like to beat him.” Hermione sighed. “There’s always next year.”

Down the table, Ginny Prewett smirked at Hermione’s disappointment. “Serves her right.”

Blaise sighed. “Give it up, Ginny. Now tell me, how did you do?”

“I finished ninth if you must know.” Ginny didn’t really care that much about academics. “You?”

“Fifth. As you heard, Lupin and Snape took the top two places. Black and Nott were third and fourth.” Blaise was happy with his standing. “Slytherin took three out of the top five places.”

“How did Potter do?” Ginny tried to look at Blaise’s parchment.

Blaise pulled it away. “Why so interested?”

“Because he’s coming to stay during the holidays and I want some ammunition.” Ginny explained.

Blaise grinned. “He finished fourteenth, just in front of your brother.”

Ginny sniggered. “I can’t wait for Mum to find out.”

“Did I ever tell you that you’ve got one mean streak?” Blaise teased his fiancé.

“But that’s why you like me.” Ginny stood up. “I’ve got to finish packing. I’ll see you later.”

Blaise watched as Ginny left the table and went out of the room. He got up, but not before glancing in Isobella Porter’s direction. A few minutes after he left the room, the girl got up and followed him. Hermione watched, knowing exactly what was going on.

Once in the empty classroom, Blaise waited for Isobella to come in before grabbing her wrist. “Are you going to miss me?”

Isobella nodded eagerly. “You know I will.”

“Come here.” Blaise pulled Isobella to him before lazily kissing her. “Ginny’s going to be staying with the Blacks for the last week of the holidays. I’m going to be a little lonesome. Would you like to meet up?”

Isobella couldn’t help herself; even though she knew what she was doing was wrong, she didn’t care. “I’d love to. Where?”

“I’ll let you know.” Blaise kissed her again, letting his hands slide under her robe. “You are so lovely.”

Isobella blushed. “So are you.”

Blaise kissed her one final time before letting her go. “I’ll be in touch.”

Isobella sighed as Blaise left the room before waiting a few minutes and exiting herself.

A few moments after she did so, Ginny removed the disillusionment spell. She couldn't believe that Blaise had gone back to the girl, particularly after Snape had found out about the two of them, and had threatened to make the affair public. Ginny liked being known as the fiancé of Blaise Zabini, and she hadn't wanted anyone to think that she didn't have what it took to keep him. She'd therefore bowed to Snape's demands and backed off from harassing the younger students.

As she sat on the desk, she wondered what to do about Blaise's continued liaisons with Isobella. After thinking about it, she decided that as long as it didn't become public, it didn't really bother her that much. Her mother had warned her that men were all alike, and that you had to take whatever you could. Ginny decided that it was time for her to do some taking. On going through the possibilities in her mind, she eventually got to Jamie Potter. She knew that he was dating Cho Chang, but she considered the girl to be a bore, and while she hadn't particularly liked Jamie when she'd first met him, they had at least been quite cordial and friendly to each other the previous Christmas. Grinning, Ginny got up. Deciding that Jamie might be worth having a little fun with, Ginny pulled open the door and headed off to Slytherin, a small smile playing on her lips.

17th July 1995

Tired and aching from his dueling session that day, Harry had fallen asleep quickly, only to wake up to find it was two in the morning. Thirsty, he got out of bed. As he made his way downstairs, Harry thought about the session. Severus had now taught him everything he could except for the one curse Harry would need to use on his birthday. Trying to ignore the knots that made themselves known in his stomach whenever he thought about his birthday, Harry headed into the kitchen and pulled open the fridge.

"Is yous alright, Master Harry?" Pasha's voice came out of the darkness making Harry jump and drop the bottle of milk he was holding. "I is sorry, Master Harry."

Harry repaired the bottle and vanished the mess on the floor. "It's okay Pasha. Do we have any more milk?"

Pasha shook her head. "Me gets some."

Harry waited patiently for the elf to return, thanking her when she did and taking the glass of milk she poured for him. "Goodnight Pasha."

"Night, Master Harry." Pasha disappeared.

Harry had started to make his way back towards the stairs when a noise alerted him to the fact that someone had just apparated into the hallway. Hearing soft voices he realized that whoever it was, they weren't alone. Curious, Harry turned round and headed into the hallway. He then almost lost his second container of milk of the night. Standing in the hallway was his Dad and a guest. Harry's mouth fell open. "What are you doing here?"

Next chapter: We find out who the mystery guest is. Hopefully, I'll actually be able to post tomorrow.

Chapter 50: Understanding

Remus put a hand on Jamie's shoulder. "Go into the sitting room."

Harry was worried. "Are Maman and Sirius alright?"

"They're fine, Harry." Remus told him. "Jamie needed someone to talk to."

Harry had the feeling that Remus wasn't being entirely honest with him. "In the middle of the night?"

"Yes, Harry, in the middle of the night." Remus snapped. "Now I suggest you go back to bed."

Aware that Remus wouldn't normally be this short with him and that something must be seriously wrong, Harry nevertheless bid his father goodnight, turned and went up the staircase. Almost an hour later, still dressed in his outdoor clothing, Jamie was about to open his bedroom door, when Harry slipped out of the shadows. "Is everything alright?"

Jamie's face looked strained. "Everything's fine. As Uncle Remus said, I merely needed someone to talk to."

"Why couldn't you talk to Maman or Sirius?" Harry didn't mean to push his twfin, but he was interested to know exactly what was going on.

"Because I just couldn't, okay." Jamie opened his door. "Goodnight Harry."

As Jamie stepped through the doorway, Harry spotted a flash of silver under his cloak.

Not really wanting to believe that it was what he thought it was, Harry unholstered his wand within moments. "Accio mask."

Jamie's mask flew out from under his cloak and into Harry's hand. Jamie span round. "It's not what it looks like."

Harry turned the mask over in his hand. "It looks a lot like a mask for a lieutenant of Voldemort to me."

"Harry, give it him back." Remus had moved silently upstairs to stand behind Harry.

Harry handed the mask back over before whirling around to face his Dad. "What the hell is going on?"

Remus walked up the corridor and pushed open his bedroom door. "Harry, Jamie. Please go in and sit down."

Jamie began to shake. "He's going to tell on me, isn't he?"

Remus shook his head. "No, Jamie. He's not."

Jamie swallowed hard. "I don't believe you."

Harry holstered his wand as he sat down. "Jamie, Dad's telling the truth. I'm not going to tell anyone about you."

Jamie looked suspiciously at Harry. "Why not?"

Remus sat down next to Jamie. "Jamie, Harry knows that I'm Praeses."

Harry wanted an explanation. "Dad, please tell me what's going on."

Jamie looked down at the mask he held in his hands. "You're free to tell him about me but I want an oath from him first."

Remus glanced over at Harry. "Harry, can you please swear to keep what we're about to tell you secret?"

Harry nodded. "I swear that unless I'm given permission to divulge the information I'm about to learn, that I won't reveal it to another living soul." He looked at Jamie. "Good enough?"

Satisfied, Jamie gave Remus permission to discuss his problem. "Yes. You can tell him now, Uncle Remus."

"You need to release me from my oath, Jamie." Remus instructed.

Jamie subsequently released Remus from the oath he'd sworn at Villa Laurifer, and Remus began. "Just before school ended, the Dark Lord called a meeting which I attended. While I was there I was invited to dinner. On entering the dining room I found someone there I never expected to see..."

June 17th 1995

Remus walked into the room, failing to hide his shock at the person sitting at the table.

"Uncle Remus!" Jamie looked stunned as Remus walked into the room. "What are you doing here?"

Remus didn't get a chance to answer as Voldemort walked into the room, followed by the remainder of the Order. "Jamie, these are my most trusted servants. You already know Praeses."

Remus inclined his head towards Jamie. "Jamie."

Jamie's face registered his astonishment as he realized that his Uncle wasn't there by force but willingly as a Death Eater and a member of Voldemort's illustrious Order.

Voldemort hid a smile as he introduced everyone else. "Unfortunately Lamia can't be here tonight but you should remember Amicus from your initiation."

Amicus' three-quarter mask allowed Jamie to see that the man had graced him with a brief but blurry smile. Afraid of him, Jamie smiled back. "Hi."

"Bella, come here my dear." Voldemort drew Bella forward. "Bella and Remus are secondary only to Amicus. You will obey them as you would me."

Jamie inclined his head. "Yes, Sir."

Bella frowned at Jamie's form of address but Voldemort continued as if he hadn't noticed. "Finally, you probably already know Lucius and Petra Malfoy, better known as Astus and Callide."

Jamie did. He wasn't exactly on friendly terms with Matthias Malfoy but he knew who his parents were. "Lord Malfoy, Lady Malfoy."

Petra laughed at Jamie's formality. "You may call us Lucius and Petra when we are alone like this."

Lucius, however, didn't look particularly impressed to see Jamie sitting there. "He's a little young, isn't he?"

"Actually, he's not much younger than Amicus' protégé." Voldemort informed him.

"You have a protégé?" Petra sounded interested.

Amicus smirked. "I do, Petra. But I'm afraid he's a little too young for you."

Petra wasn't fazed. "That might be, but is he any good?"

"He's actually extremely talented." Amicus turned to Remus. "Wouldn't you agree, Remus?"

Remus reluctantly concurred. "I would."

Petra was now interested. "Remus knows who he is?"

"I do." Remus didn't enlighten her any further as to why, and the conversation moved on to the other things.

Jamie sat there as the conversation over dinner ebbed and flowed. He felt very much out of place and just wanted it to be over.

Eventually Voldemort got to his feet. "I expect to see you all here next week with the exception of Jamie and Remus. Remus, please escort Jamie back to school."

Remus and Jamie both bowed as Voldemort left the room. Remus picked up his mask. "Jamie, put on your mask and come with me."

Jamie did as he was told. Only once they'd apparated out to Hogsmeade, did Remus stop and throw up a privacy bubble. "I think some sort of explanation is due, Jamie."

Even though the night wasn't particularly cold, Jamie shivered at his Uncle's frosty tone. "Isn't there somewhere warmer where we can have this discussion?"

Remus nodded. "My rooms. Let's go."

After a brisk walk, the two of them found themselves in Remus' rooms. Frances was surprised to see Jamie with Remus. "Is Harry alright?"

"He's fine, Frances." Remus indicated that Jamie should take a seat. "Do you want anything to drink?"

"Please." Jamie wasn't sure what Remus was going to do with him, and was more than a little apprehensive.

Remus called out for Pasha, and Jamie soon found himself in possession of a mug of hot chocolate. "Pasha's one of the Potter house elves, isn't she?"

"She is." Remus confirmed before turning to the matter at hand. "Let me just put up a privacy bubble, and then we can talk."

Jamie remained silent while Remus cast the spell to ensure that their conversation would be heard by them alone.

"Now then. I'd like to know how you managed to get out of school this evening." Remus sounded rather stern.

Frightened by his Uncle's demeanor, Jamie hurried to tell him. "Amicus sent me a portkey to take me out of school but I was told that I'd have to apparate back."

"Who taught you how to apparate?" Remus shook his head. "Stupid question really; I suppose it was Sirius."

Jamie verified Remus' guess. "After the first task went wrong, Dad decided to show me how to apparate. I couldn't tell him that Harry already knew, and that was how we really managed to get away."

"Your Dad actually already knows that Harry can apparate. We both taught Harry how to do it after the night at the World Cup." Remus informed Jamie. "Does Sirius know that you're a Death Eater?"

Jamie looked as if he was going to cry. "No. Please don't tell him. Dad would kill me."

"Why did you do it, Jamie?" Remus asked quietly.

Jamie then told him about the previous Christmas.

December 20th 1994

Jamie was excited to be going to Diagon Alley with his Dad. "Can we go into Knockturn Alley?"

Sirius shook his head. "No, and I want your word that you won't try and go there yourself once I leave you alone."

Jamie looked sullen. "Okay, Dad. I promise I won't go to Knockturn Alley."

Sirius ruffled his hair. "Good. Now are you sure you'll be alright on your own?"

"Daaad." Jamie couldn't help whining. He was glad to be finally allowed to wander around Diagon Alley unaccompanied. "I need you gone so I can do my Christmas shopping."

An hour later Jamie had a handful of galleons left, and was inside the bookstore looking for a magical cooking book he knew his Mum wanted. He'd already arranged for Sirius' present, a new bag for his medical equipment, to be delivered by owl mail, as well as gifts for his siblings and Cho. All that remained was to buy a present for Ron.

After having his Mum's book shrunk, Jamie headed for the quidditch store, only for a voice to call out his name. As Jamie turned in the direction of the sound, he felt something touch him before a tug behind his navel whisked him away from Diagon Alley. On landing, Jamie found himself standing in a very familiar graveyard. Grateful for Sirius' lessons in apparition, Jamie immediately tried to apparate out.

"Hello Jamie." Voldemort walked out from the trees, four Death Eaters flanking him. "Don't think that you're going to be going anywhere this time, because you're not. I've taken the precaution of erecting the wards myself."

Jamie gulped. "What do you want?"

"Your blood." Voldemort's words sent shivers down Jamie's spine.

Jamie turned to run but before he could, two of the Death Eaters moved to grab him.

"Hold him steady." An obviously female, silver-masked Death Eater pulled out a large knife and approached Jamie.

Catching sight of the knife, Jamie started to panic. "No. No. No. Get away from me." However, as he was being held in a firm grip, Jamie could do little else but watch as his sleeve was rolled up, baring his arm.

The Death Eater then drew the knife across Jamie's arm making him cry out. Jamie stared in horrid fascination as his blood ran in rivulets down into a vial which, once full, the woman then passed to Voldemort.

Voldemort held the vial of blood up to the light. "With this blood my resurrection will be complete."

Jamie found his voice again. "What do you mean?"

Voldemort leant close to Jamie and whispered. "The only thing I needed to complete my return to full strength was the blood of my enemy. And whose blood is better than that of the Boy Who Lived, my most beloved adversary?"

Jamie felt sick. "Why didn't you just kill me and take it?"

"I needed to take it from an unwilling donor. If you'd been dead, you'd hardly be unwilling." Voldemort smiled maliciously at Jamie. "What to do with you now that you've served your purpose?" Voldemort tapped his chin with his wand as he appeared to consider Jamie's fate. "To prove my generosity to you, I'm going to give you an opportunity to live."

"What opportunity?" Jamie wanted to cry.

"Join me or die." Voldemort said simply. He then nodded to the two Death Eaters holding Jamie. "You can let him go now; he won't be leaving unless I say he can."

After being released, Jamie stood there. He didn't know what to do. He didn't really want to join Voldemort but he knew he didn't want to die either.

"My Lord." The woman who had cut Jamie spoke up. "Forgive me, but I have information that may make young Potter's choice a little easier."

Voldemort laughed. "Aah, yes, you do, don't you, Lamia? Please feel free to share this information with our young guest."

Lamia walked up to Jamie. "Do you know why you went hunting for unicorns on a detention where you nearly died?"

Jamie nodded. "Of course I do. I was being punished for dueling with Hermione Snape."

Lamia continued. "Who assigned your detention, Potter?"

"Dumbledore did." Jamie didn't see why the woman wanted to know but answered anyway.

"Dumbledore did." Lamia's tone was scornful. "Do you really think that a normal teacher would send a poor defenseless first year student into the middle of the Forbidden Forest so late in the night? You almost died that night, didn't you Potter?"

Jamie remembered how frightened he'd been when he'd woken up in the hospital to find his Dad, his Uncle Craig and their team rushing around, all fighting to save his life. "I did."

"And speaking of your first year, don't you think it a little strange that the tests you went through, to reach what you thought was the Philosopher's Stone, were so easy?" Lamia enjoyed watching the conflicting looks that were racing across Jamie's face.

"I had help and they weren't exactly easy." Jamie protested.

Lamia laughed. "A third year student could have managed alone."

Jamie knew she was telling the truth. "So what?"

"You were being tested, Potter." Lamia informed him. "By Dumbledore."

"I don't believe you." Jamie whispered half-heartedly.

Lamia walked around Jamie. "That's not all. Do you really think that Dumbledore wasn't aware of the creature that lived in the Secret Chamber beneath the School? That he couldn't have done something about it?"

"But Dumbledore doesn't speak parseltongue." Jamie pointed out. "He couldn't have gotten into the Chamber."

“But he knew someone who did.” Lamia continued circling Jamie. “The coward’s daughter would have helped him if he’d asked.”

Jamie frowned. “Coward’s daughter?”

The man with the embossed mask finally spoke up. “Snape was supposed to have been a Death Eater and fled instead. His daughter could have gotten Dumbledore into the Chamber.”

Jamie’s mouth fell open as he discovered that his Professor had almost become a Death Eater. “Are you telling me that Dumbledore didn’t use Snape because he wanted me to find a way in on my own?”

Lamia smiled. “You’re finally getting the picture, Potter.”

“But Dumbledore didn’t know about the diary at first.” Jamie knew that whoever held the diary had held the key to getting into the Chamber. “And...”

“It doesn’t matter whether he did or didn’t.” Lamia interrupted Jamie. “What matters is that because Dumbledore failed to act when he did find out about the diary you ended up in the Chamber.”

Jamie shook his head. “It wasn’t Dumbledore’s fault I ended up there. He wasn’t even in school when I did.”

“He still knew exactly what was going on.” Lamia sneered at Jamie. “Potter, he hoped you’d go into the Chamber and face the Basilisk.”

“What if I’d died?” Jamie asked, almost fearing the answer.

“Then Dumbledore had a second candidate waiting in the wings.” Lamia informed him.

“Who?” Jamie had a feeling he already knew the answer.

“Your brother, of course, who else?” Amicus told him.

Jamie still wasn't entirely convinced. "How do you know all this about Dumbledore?"

Voldemort laughed. "Because Lamia here is Dumbledore's closest confidante. He trusts her implicitly. Unfortunately for Dumbledore, Lamia is my faithful servant."

"That's right Potter. Dumbledore, fool that he is, thinks I'm his friend." Lamia laughed at the disbelieving look on Jamie's face. "You still don't believe me, do you?"

Jamie shook his head. "No, I don't."

Lamia sighed. "After your first year, Dumbledore still needed to test his precious Boy Who Lived. Were you going to be malleable enough, brave enough, loyal enough? That's why he didn't bother stepping in to help your girlfriend when she got the diary. He knew that eventually you'd be forced to help her. You were just his puppet."

Jamie frowned. "Dumbledore knew Cho had the diary?"

"With all that dark magic she was doing?" Lamia laughed. "Dumbledore was tied into the wards of Hogwarts; he'd have known the first time she cast a spell."

When Jamie didn't say anything, Lamia continued. "And do you know why you're in the Triwizard Tournament, Potter?"

"Because my name came out of the Goblet of Fire, of course." Jamie's tone bordered on sarcastic.

"But it shouldn't have." Lamia pointed out. "Hogwarts already had a Champion."

Jamie scowled. "Harry."

"Yes, Harry, Jamie." Amicus knew that Jamie didn't think much of his brother. "But even he wasn't supposed to have taken part."

Realization of how Harry had made it into the Tournament blossomed on Jamie's face. "You put Harry's name in?"

"Well done, Jamie." Amicus' compliment sounded anything but. "I did." Amicus couldn't resist boasting. "It was also me who gave the diary to Draco Black."

Jamie was puzzled. "Why give it to Draco?"

"That's none of your business." Amicus wasn't about to share his reasons with Jamie. "But back to the Tournament. Your name only came out because Dumbledore made it so."

Jamie looked down at his hands which were shaking. "How do I know that everything you're telling me is the truth?"

"Trust your instincts, Potter." Lamia told him. "Dumbledore is no more your friend than I am his."

Voldemort held up his hand to stop Lamia from saying anything else and simply waited as Jamie assimilated everything he'd been told. Jamie's emotions were churning around inside of him, wanting to explode. Jamie knew that Dumbledore had been the cause of his and Harry's separation. He now also knew that he'd nearly died twice in his first year because of the headmaster, to say nothing of his second year. Jamie felt his anger growing as he thought about his girlfriend and the hell she had gone through because of the diary and, if what Lamia insinuated was true, all because of Dumbledore. And now Dumbledore was risking his life again by entering him into the Triwizard Tournament.

Voldemort smiled. "So tell me Jamie, have you made a decision?"

Jamie hesitated. "If I join you, will you help me against Dumbledore?"

Voldemort laughed triumphantly. "I'll do more than that."

Jamie knew then what his answer was going to be. "What do I need to do?"

Voldemort turned to the other Death Eaters. "Leave us. Amicus, you may remain." Voldemort placed a hand on the hooded man's shoulder to stop him from leaving.

Lamia and the two other Death Eaters disappeared one by one from the graveyard, until only Voldemort, Jamie and Amicus remained.

"Kneel, Potter. Do you pledge your allegiance to me, body and soul?" Voldemort demanded of the now kneeling boy.

Jamie responded in a surprisingly steady voice, one which didn't show the nervousness he was now feeling. "I do." Jamie started to bare his left arm, only to be stopped by Voldemort. "You may rise. Before I honor you with the Dark Mark, I've decided that you will perform two tasks for me."

As Jamie climbed to his feet, Voldemort turned to Amicus. "You will instruct him."

Amicus nodded as Voldemort apparated out. "For your first task, Jamie, you will bring one recruit to your initiation."

Jamie wondered who he would be able to talk into joining the Dark Lord. It wasn't as if his friends were exactly lining up to be Death Eaters. "And the second?"

"You are to kill one of the other students." Amicus watched Jamie pale.

"I can't kill someone." Jamie's voice shook.

"If you aren't going to do it, then you've already failed and I may as well kill you now." Amicus pulled out his wand. "What's it to be?"

"I'll do it." Jamie's words tumbled out as he hurried to respond to the man in front of him. "When?"

"Your initiation is to be held on February 1st. A portkey will be sent to you." Amicus holstered his wand. "Your family and any purebloods are off-limits. Disobey that rule and you will be punished."

Jamie nodded. "I understand. What do I do now?"

Amicus passed Jamie two masks. "One is for you and the other for your chosen recruit. Make sure you're both wearing them when you operate your portkey."

Jamie slipped the masks under his cloak. "How do I get back to Diagon Alley?"

Amicus handed over a small stone. "This portkey will take you back. Make sure you don't fail; I'd hate for our next meeting to be anything other than amicable."

Jamie took the stone. "I won't fail."

Amicus spoke the activation words. "Dumbledore's Puppet."

June 17th 1995

"I found myself back where I'd been taken from." Jamie told Remus.

"You killed Miranda Bailey?" Remus was horrified.

"I spilt some ink and cast a slipping charm." Jamie struggled not to cry in front of Remus.

Remus knew he couldn't tell Jamie that he wasn't what he appeared to be. "A good choice."

Jamie looked amazed. "You're not going to tell anyone?"

Remus shook his head. "You also serve my Master; why would I do that?"

"I just thought that... But you're a teacher." Jamie's voice was incredulous as well as relieved.

"I'm a Death Eater first." Remus lied. "Tell me Jamie. Who did you pick as a recruit?"

“Ginny Prewett.” Jamie admitted. “She and Ron came over for Christmas. I was talking to her when I brought up You-Know-Who. She was pretty enthusiastic about his ideals so I eventually took a chance and told her about what I’d done. She then offered to join me on 1st February.”

“Did she try to kill Hermione Snape?” Remus asked.

Jamie nodded. “She was punished for it though. Amicus had warned her off purebloods at my initiation.”

“Has she got to kill someone else instead?” Remus didn’t hold out much hope that Voldemort would have changed his rules.

Jamie shook his head. “She’s already done it. She used reducto to kill a muggle.”

“When?” Remus asked.

“Our last Hogsmeade visit. Someone called Angelus was waiting for her.” Jamie was glad to finally have someone he felt he could trust to talk to.

“Under no circumstances are you to tell Prewett about me.” Remus warned.

“I can’t anyway.” Jamie told Remus. “You-Know-Who made me swear an oath not to reveal the identities of the Order. The only one I don’t know is Lamia.”

“In that case I won’t be sharing her identity with you.” Remus didn’t want Jamie to know that he too had no idea who Lamia was. He then changed the subject. “Jamie, I’ve decided that I’m going to help you in any way I can.”

Jamie let out a sigh of relief. “Thanks, Uncle, I mean Professor.”

“Jamie, a few things.” Remus got up and helped himself to a glass of scotch. “First of all, when you talk about Lord Voldemort, don’t call

him 'You-Know-Who'. He should be referred to as 'My Lord, My Master or the Dark Lord.'

Jamie nodded. "Okay. What else?"

"You can call me Uncle Remus when we're alone like this." Remus sat back down. "However, if you speak to me during a meeting, you must only call me Praeses. Obviously in school it's 'Professor'."

Jamie smiled gratefully at Remus. "Thanks. I've been so worried about messing up."

Remus couldn't believe that Voldemort had recruited Jamie. The boy was totally unprepared and more than a little naïve. "It's okay. If you ever need to speak to me, you can come here."

"What about Harry?" Jamie asked.

"What about him?" Remus wondered if Jamie knew about Harry.

"You won't tell him or Dudley about me, will you?" Jamie couldn't bear for them to find out.

Remus smiled a little mockingly. "I can't tell anyone except for my fellow lieutenants about you. Do you really think that I'm going to tell Harry and risk dying?"

Jamie smiled as well. "I suppose not."

Remus yawned. "How did you hide where you were going tonight?"

"Ron covered for me. He knows what I am." Jamie admitted. "I made him swear not to tell anyone before I told him." Jamie didn't tell Remus that Ron had no idea that he'd killed Miranda Bailey.

Remus couldn't believe it. "Is he a Death Eater as well?"

"No. He refused. But he's my friend and won't tell on me." Jamie had told Ron that he didn't have any choice.

“Good.” Remus stood up. “It’s getting late. Do you want to stay here tonight? I have a spare room.”

Jamie looked hopeful. “If I could.”

“You can.” Remus pointed out the door. “I’ll get one of the house-elves to fetch your pajamas and leave a message with Ron that you weren’t feeling well, and that I’ve let you stay here.”

Jamie wished he could tell Ron about his uncle. “Thanks and goodnight, Uncle Remus.”

“Goodnight, Jamie.” Remus waited for Jamie to close the door before collapsing into a chair. He couldn’t believe that Jamie had ended up going down the same path as Harry. Deciding that he’d better get to bed, Remus got up and walked into his room.

Present Time

Harry sat there shell-shocked. “So you know who all the Lieutenants are?”

Jamie nodded. “Except for Lamia. Uncle Remus can’t tell me either.”

Harry looked quizzically at Remus. “I didn’t think you knew, Dad.”

“I don’t.” Remus grinned at Jamie’s surprised face. “I was hardly going to admit to you that I didn’t know.”

Jamie grinned back. “You had me fooled.”

“I’m good at what I do.” Remus told him.

Harry got up. “Dad, can I have a word?”

Remus moved over to where Harry was standing, and threw up a privacy bubble. “What is it?”

Harry was blunt. “Does he know that you’re not exactly loyal to Voldemort?”

Remus shook his head. "His Occlumency skills are good, but they're not that good."

"How about that secret-keeper spell we used when we stayed at Dae's? Can't we use that?" Harry asked.

Remus smiled at his son. "Now I know why you finished first in your year. I should have thought of it myself."

Remus dropped the privacy bubble and moved to sit back down next to Jamie. "Jamie, take my hand." Remus ordered. Jamie did as he was told and watched as Harry took his other hand and Remus' remaining one. Harry nodded at his Dad who muttered something quietly under his breath. "Okay, we can talk freely now."

Jamie looked at Remus. "So what do you want to talk about?"

"Me. I'm a traitor, Jamie. I don't give a damn about the Dark Lord and his ideals." Remus watched as Jamie's face took on a suspicious look.

"How do I really know that you're not trying to trick me?" Jamie challenged Remus' statement.

"You let me into your mind when I was trying to help with your Occlumency." Remus gently reminded him. "Jamie, I know exactly how you feel about what you've been forced to do."

Jamie's face crumpled. "I've been so frightened. I didn't want to kill anyone but I was terrified of dying myself. I didn't know what to do or who to turn to."

Harry felt sorry for his twin. "I understand."

Jamie shook his head as he sobbed. "No, Harry, you don't. I've killed someone. You've got no idea what it feels like to know you've got to do something like that."

Harry looked meaningfully at Remus who got up and opened his closet before bringing out a silver mask. "This is Harry's."

Jamie's mouth fell open. "Has the whole family joined?"

Even with the distasteful situation, Harry burst out laughing. "Not exactly."

Jamie couldn't stop staring at the mask. "Why is your mask different? The symbols on it are red."

"I'm Amicus' protégé." Harry answered. "Or at least I will be on my fifteenth birthday."

Jamie gasped. "He mentioned you when Uncle Remus first found out about me. Amicus said that you were extremely talented." Jamie frowned. "But why wait until your fifteenth birthday?"

Harry sighed. "Because usually wizards don't have enough power until then to perform the killing curse." Harry looked contemplatively at Jamie. "Saying that, you were obviously inducted before your fifteenth birthday. How did you manage it?"

Jamie wiped his face with his sleeve. "I haven't yet. As you know, I killed Miranda by other means." Jamie started to cry again. "I didn't want to do it, but I had no choice, Harry. If I hadn't done it, Amicus said he'd kill me."

Harry laid a hand on his brother's arm. "Jamie, I can't say it's alright because killing someone isn't, but I do understand. I'm also pretty convinced that Amicus would have carried out his threat if you hadn't done as he'd demanded. He's already nearly killed Professor Jameson and Hermione."

"I should have taken the chance that he wouldn't have carried out his threat." Jamie began to cry even harder.

Remus reached behind him and picked up a calming potion off his dresser. "Jamie, take this."

Jamie swallowed the potion and soon began to calm down. "Thanks."

Jamie turned to Harry. "There's something you should know." He swallowed hard. "Ginny tried to kill Hermione."

Harry scowled. "I knew it. Hermione said she hadn't and..." Harry's voice trailed off before he frowned at Jamie. "Prewett's a Death Eater?" Remus hadn't mentioned that part of his conversation with Jamie when telling Harry as he hadn't wanted Harry to blow up at Jamie.

Jamie nodded. "I introduced her to the Dark Lord as my first task."

Harry looked at his Dad. "Will I have to recruit someone?"

Remus shook his head. "Amicus has only asked for a first kill, nothing more."

Jamie now understood why Harry was able to sympathize with him. "Will you have to perform the killing curse?"

Harry nodded. "Unfortunately, yes. I'm just lucky that Amicus made Dad my sponsor."

Jamie looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"As Harry's sponsor, I get to choose his first kill." Remus explained. "I'll be able to do everything I can to make it a little easier on him."

Jamie looked doubtful. "But you can't do it for him, can you?"

Remus shook his head. "You're right, Jamie, I can't."

Jamie looked quizzically at Remus. "Why didn't I have a sponsor?"

"Usually you would, but I suppose as Lord Voldemort chose you, he obviously thought you didn't need one." Remus surmised. "You really could have done with one though; which is why I took you under my wing. I'm not exactly overjoyed to be teaching you, but as my nephew, I couldn't leave you to flounder on your own."

Jamie looked at his brother. "How much has Uncle Remus taught you?"

Remus jumped in before Harry could respond. "Jamie, even though I'm Harry's sponsor, I'm not actually training him."

"Why not?" Jamie was surprised.

"Because it's too difficult for me to perform the Cruciatus on Harry. I've already done it once at Harry's insistence, but there's no way I'm ever going to do it again." Remus informed him.

"What would happen if the Dark Lord told you to?" Jamie was curious to see how ruthless his Uncle really was.

"Then Dad would do it." Harry saved Remus from answering. "Jamie, there's something you should know." Harry could see that Remus was interested in what he was about to say. "While Dad has obviously taken responsibility for you, don't expect him to step in for either of us should it come down to it."

Jamie appeared bemused. "You don't really mean that Uncle Remus would just stand back while you were tortured or something, do you?"

Remus nodded. "Jamie, that's exactly what he does mean. In fact I've already done it once."

It was now Harry's turn to look puzzled. "When?"

Jamie too looked puzzled until he remembered Bella. "Uncle Remus is right. It happened when I was disrespectful about the Dark Lord."

Harry leant forward. "What exactly did you do?"

"I forgot to call You-Know-Who the Dark Lord like Uncle Remus had told me to, and Bella overheard me." Jamie hated the black haired Death Eater.

"What did she do to you?" Harry guessed it had to be bad.

“Put me under the Cruciatus curse.” Jamie shuddered as he remembered. “Uncle Remus also pulled his wand on me but Bella beat him to it.”

“You do know why Dad had to look as if he was going to punish you as well, don’t you?” Harry wanted to make sure that Jamie was entirely sure where Remus stood.

“I do now.” Jamie told him. “I’m just glad that Uncle Remus isn’t what he really appears to be. I’d have been lost without him. He’s taught me so much in such a short time.”

“Is he teaching you Dark Magic?” Harry asked.

Remus nodded. “I’m teaching him exactly the same as Severus is teaching you in preparation for your first time.”

Harry wasn’t happy to hear that. “But Dad, you don’t even know that Jamie will have to make a kill again.”

“But he will, Harry.” Remus smiled encouragingly at Jamie, who looked a little scared. “You can tell him.”

Harry frowned. “Tell me what?”

“I’ve got to kill Dumbledore.” Jamie said quietly.

Harry was completely taken aback. “Merlin, Jamie. Do you have any idea how powerful Dumbledore is?”

Jamie shrugged. “I know he’s probably second in power to the Dark Lord.”

Harry didn’t agree. “Actually I think Amicus might be a lot more powerful than Dumbledore.”

Jamie snorted. Frightened as he was of Amicus, he hadn’t seen anything to convince him that the Death Eater was anything but average. “But he’s only a Death Eater.”

"I'm actually of the same opinion as Harry, Jamie." Remus got up. "Dumbledore is getting old, whereas I believe Amicus is fairly young in comparison."

"How do you know that he's that powerful?" Jamie was still unconvinced.

"Because he helped the Dark Lord take down Azkaban." Remus admitted. "They went in together and everyone else followed."

This was news, even to Harry. "You didn't tell me that when you got back."

"I was exhausted, Harry." Remus shivered at the thought of the prison, and moved over to the fireplace, lighting a fire despite the warm temperature in the room. "Telling you who did what when I got home, wasn't exactly my first priority. I just wanted to forget I'd ever been there."

Chastened, Harry had a question for Jamie. "You were already a Death Eater then; how come you didn't have to go?"

"Only the Order went, Harry." Remus answered the question for him. "Tonight was only Jamie's fourth time at a meeting. He's barely au fait yet with what goes on, and isn't anywhere near ready to be going out on missions."

Jamie picked up his mask. "I wasn't made a Lieutenant until the night I met Uncle Remus at the Dark Lord's house. Someone had apparently died and the Dark Lord needed a replacement. I still don't know why he picked me."

Remus answered his question. "It's a status thing, Jamie."

Harry frowned. "Who died?"

"Angelus. We heard from our contacts in the Ministry that he'd been found murdered. When his body was found it was hushed up." Remus and Severus had agreed not to tell Harry about what Severus

had done, and in the Ministry, any rumors about Rosier's death had been quashed by Leo and Dae.

Harry let out a whistle. "Didn't Voldemort suspect you?"

Jamie flinched when Harry called Voldemort by his true name. "Why would he suspect Uncle Remus?"

"Because Angelus and Dad had an argument on the day I was told I was to become Amicus' protégé." Harry then proceeded to fill Jamie in on what had happened. "That's why I wondered if perhaps Voldemort had punished Dad for Angelus' disappearance."

Remus shook his head. "He disappeared on the same day we took Azkaban."

"So the Dark Lord only found out Angelus was dead after the Azkaban mission?" Jamie asked as he tried to get the chain of events right in his head.

Remus nodded. "Not that we missed him. The whole operation worked flawlessly."

Harry gave a bitter laugh. "I wouldn't exactly say that."

Jamie made an educated guess at what Harry meant. "Were you hurt, Uncle Remus?"

"Yes he was." Harry told his brother before Remus could deny it. "His upper body was cut to shreds."

"Did the Aurors do that?" Jamie rubbed his hands together as he stood in front of the fire.

Remus made the flames climb higher. "We'd gone before the Aurors made it to Azkaban."

"How did you get injured then?" Jamie asked. "Did the prison warders attack you?"

"I was injured as I killed two former Death Eaters who'd been imprisoned there. One of them had a knife; where he'd got it from though, I have no idea." Remus waited to see if Jamie would make the connection with the newspaper report.

He did. Jamie shot backwards. "You're a..."

"Yes, Jamie, Dad's a Death Eater and a werewolf." Harry was getting a little fed up with everyone's reactions to his Dad's affliction. "Get over it."

"Harry, I think you're being a little unfair to Jamie." Remus was a little annoyed at Jamie's reaction but not particularly troubled by it.

Jamie tentatively hugged Remus. "Sorry, Uncle Remus." Knowing that his parents had both gone to school with Remus, Jamie wondered if they'd known. "Do Mum and Dad have any idea about you?"

"They do. Actually your Dad used to run with me in the Forbidden Forest when we were at school together." Remus smiled as he remembered what his friend had done for him.

"But Dad's not a werewolf." Jamie pointed out.

"But he's a dog animagus." Remus reminded Jamie. "Speaking of animagi, has Sirius begun instructing you yet?"

Jamie's guilty look was enough to answer his question. "He has but Mum doesn't know. Dad said that she'd go mad if she found out."

"Maman knows I'm an animagus." Harry couldn't see any harm in telling his brother. "Not that she was exactly overjoyed when she found out I wanted to be one." Harry admitted.

Jamie felt a little jealous that he hadn't yet managed to transform. "What are you?"

Harry changed and growled quietly at Jamie, before turning back. "What do you think?"

"That is so cool." Jamie sighed. "I haven't been able to center myself enough to transform."

"So you know what you're going to be then?" Harry wondered whether because they were twins it would be something similar to him.

"A raven." Jamie quite liked his animagus form.

"I was half expecting you to say a dog or something." Harry admitted.

"That's what I wanted to be." Jamie had been disappointed at first as he'd wanted to be just like his Dad. "Right now, it doesn't really matter what I'm going to be because I'm not doing very well at transforming."

"It takes time." Remus reassured him. "You'll get there eventually."

Jamie was grateful for his Uncle's reassurance. "That's what Dad told me."

A comfortable silence fell for a few moments until, after thinking over what Jamie had told him so far, Harry had one last question for his twin. "Is there anything else you haven't told me or Dad?"

Jamie thought for a moment. "You know I told you that the Dark Lord took me to the graveyard, and Lamia told me about Dumbledore?" Remus nodded. "Well, I almost forgot, the Dark Lord told me that Lamia was Dumbledore's closest confidante."

Remus kept his face bereft of expression as he realized exactly who Lamia was. "Is that everything?"

Jamie nodded. "I think so." Jamie turned to Harry. "I'm really sorry I couldn't tell you about the diary before now."

Harry shrugged. "It's long gone but it's definitely something else I can add to the list of why I hate Amicus."

Jamie grinned at Harry. "Tell me something I don't know."

Harry then made a decision. "Jamie, I think it's best if everyone still thinks we can't stand each other. I don't want to have to explain why we suddenly appear to be friends."

Jamie agreed. "I think you're right." He grinned toothily at his brother. "Who said that that I wanted to be your friend anyway, Lupin?"

Harry grinned back. "Exactly, Potter."

"Thanks for understanding, Harry." Jamie impulsively hugged his brother before releasing him to do the same to his Uncle. "Thanks, Uncle Remus. I think I'm going to head off to bed."

"If you need me, please don't hesitate to come to my room." Remus hugged him back before opening the door and watching as Jamie left.

Harry sat back down, still looking a little shocked. "I can't believe it."

"How do you think I felt when I walked into the Dark Lord's dining room to find Jamie sitting there?" Remus laughed. "Then again, you should have seen Jamie's face when he finally realized that I was a Death Eater, and not a prisoner."

Harry couldn't help himself; he started to laugh as well. "This really isn't funny."

Remus wiped his eyes. "It's really not." He quickly sobered up. "Harry, I know who Lamia is."

"And?" Harry asked.

"Obviously I can't tell you." Remus looked frustrated. "But I am thinking of having a word with her when I next see her."

Knowing that Lamia's identity was, at the moment, a dead end as far as he was concerned, Harry turned his thoughts to Jamie. "How do you think the prophecies will work now that Jamie has sworn to defend Voldemort?"

"You know about them?" Remus was surprised.

Harry told him about overhearing Lily after he'd first reunited with his birth mother. "Maman eventually gave me the whole of both prophecies."

"I don't think the second prophecy actually means killing Lord Voldemort. I think it means killing Dumbledore." Remus surmised. "Jamie can't kill Lord Voldemort now as he's sworn allegiance to him but he can kill Dumbledore. Anyway, as I've said before, I don't think that he's the Boy Who Lived."

"Which leaves me." Harry frowned. "But I'm going to be taking the Dark Mark in two weeks. There's no way I'm going to be strong enough to kill Voldemort by then."

"Well, we're going to have to work as if you are." Remus told him. "Getting back to that second prophecy, I think Dumbledore is the Dark Lord the prophecy mentions."

"I wouldn't exactly call him a Dark Lord for splitting us up at birth, no matter how bad it was." Harry gently teased his Dad.

"Harry, you don't know the half of it." Remus couldn't tell Harry. "You need to speak to Dae if you want to know more."

Harry felt frustrated that Remus couldn't tell him anything. "I'll do it this week when I see him and Anna." He then returned to the subject of Jamie. "Are you going to tell Maman and Sirius about Jamie?"

Remus shook his head. "Absolutely not. Jamie doesn't want them to know. He's too ashamed."

"He could tell Maman." Harry thought Lily would want to know.

"I'll ask Jamie but if he says no, then you can't say anything." Remus warned.

"I won't." Harry yawned.

Remus stretched. "I know how you feel. I'm completely worn out. I'm getting a little old for all these late night shenanigans."

Harry stretched on the sofa. "I really don't want to move."

"You're welcome to sleep on the sofa if you want to, but don't say I didn't warn you if I wake you with my snoring." Remus teased Harry.

Reluctantly Harry got to his feet. "Goodnight Dad. I'm not exactly going to rush to get up tomorrow."

"Nor me." Remus hugged Harry before letting him leave.

The Next Morning

Harry knocked quietly on Jamie's door. "Jamie, are you awake?"

Jamie sat up. "Come in, Harry."

Harry went into the room and closed the door behind him. "Can I talk to you about when you became a Death Eater?"

Jamie ran a hand through his hair, making Harry laugh. "What's so funny?"

"I do that when I'm feeling stressed." Harry sat down on the edge of the bed.

Jamie scooted across the bed slightly to allow Harry more room. "So what did you want to ask?"

"How did it feel getting the Dark Mark? Were you scared?" Despite asking his Dad, Harry still needed reassuring about how it would feel.

Jamie's voice shook as he spoke. "It was awful, Harry. I've never been scared like that before. I almost bolted."

"Did it hurt?" Harry knew it would but he wanted Jamie's perspective.

“Uncle Remus said you’ve undergone the Cruciatus. Multiply that by a hundred and you won’t even come close.” Jamie shuddered. “I’d rather undergo the Cruciatus any day.”

Harry swallowed hard. “Severus has put me under it more than once and I can’t exactly say I enjoy it.”

“I’m quite sure Bella didn’t hold back when she punished me.” Knowing how taking the Dark Mark felt, Jamie felt sorry for Harry. “So I can only judge how it felt for me.”

Harry felt queasy and decided to talk about something different. “Jamie, there’s also something else I wanted to talk to you about.”

Jamie swung his legs out of bed. “Go on.”

“I think you should tell Maman.” Harry watched as a panicked look settled on Jamie’s face.

Jamie vigorously shook his head. “I can’t. She’ll hate me.”

“She knows about Dad and me, if that helps.” Harry knew that Jamie would be a lot better off with someone to talk to at home. “However, if you do decide to tell her, you can’t tell your Dad.”

“I know that. He’d go ballistic.” Jamie had heard tales about how Sirius had treated his brother.

“How about telling Maman?” Harry smiled confidently. “She’ll be on your side.”

Jamie hesitantly chewed his lip. “Do you really think I should?”

Harry got up and marched over to the fireplace. “Let’s floo her.”

Before he could change his mind, Jamie agreed. “Okay.”

Not wanting Jamie to suddenly back out, Harry hurriedly threw floo power into the fireplace. “Lily Black. Black Manor.”

Lily's head appeared after a few minutes. "Has Nia gone into labor?"

Harry smiled. "No, Maman. I need you to come through."

Lily's head disappeared and moments later she was standing in the same fireplace Harry had called her from. "Jamie, what are you doing here? I thought you were at Ron's."

At the sound of his mother's voice, Jamie started to cry. Lily rushed over and pulled him into her arms. She looked up at Harry. "What's wrong?"

Harry laid a hand on his brother's arm. "Do you want me to tell her?"

Unable to speak, Jamie simply nodded.

Harry thought it best to be direct. "Maman, Jamie's a Death Eater."

"What?" Lily pushed Jamie away from her so she could look at his face. "Sweetie, why?"

"Voldemort took him at Christmas. Jamie was basically offered a chance to live if he agreed to join him." Harry felt a little uncomfortable telling Lily but he was convinced it was for the best. "He had to make a kill, Maman."

"Oh baby." Lily pulled Jamie close to her again, and rocked him as he cried.

Remus opened the door. "I thought I heard crying."

Lily looked over at Remus. "Why didn't you do anything, Remus?"

"I couldn't. He'd already been initiated by the time I found out." Remus told her. "The Dark Lord introduced Jamie to me as his latest lieutenant one night at a dinner."

"Jamie's one of his lieutenants?" Lily's voice reflected how she felt.

Hearing the disgust and horror in his mother's voice, Jamie pulled away from her, and screamed at Harry. "See, I told you she'd hate me."

He ran towards the door, only for Remus to stop him. "Jamie, Lily doesn't hate you."

Lily held out her arms. "I don't hate you Jamie. I hate what you've been forced to do."

"Really?" Jamie looked so young and pitiful standing in his pajamas, tears rolling down his cheeks that it broke Remus' heart as he held his trembling nephew.

"Really, sweetie." Lily continued to hold out her arms until Jamie darted back across the room into them.

Remus put an arm around Harry. "Let's go."

Looking over Jamie's head, Lily stopped them. "Please don't go."

Jamie looked up through his tears. "I don't want you to go either."

"They're not going anywhere, Jamie." Lily reassured her son as she gently stroked his hair.

Jamie relaxed and Lily looked over at Remus. "I've made some headway in my research. I think now would be a good time for me to see if it works."

Remus lifted an eyebrow. "Right now?"

Lily nodded. "After finding out about Jamie, what I'm doing has now become more important than ever."

Jamie's tears dried up as he watched Remus strip off his upper clothing. "Err, Uncle Remus? What are you doing?"

Remus turned to face the wall. "Your Mum is working on deactivating my Dark Mark, which just happens to be at the base of my spine."

Harry and Jamie both gasped. "But how?" They grinned at each other as they asked in unison.

"I've managed to isolate some of the building blocks that make up the Dark Mark." Lily explained as she let go of her son to pull out her wand. "Remus is letting me use him as a guinea pig."

Jamie wiped his face. "I'm going to get a shower."

Lily let out a small sigh of relief. "I'll be here."

Recovering from his scare, Jamie shook his head. "I'll be okay, now. Harry will stay with me, won't you?" Jamie looked hopefully at his brother.

Knowing that Lily and Remus would probably get more done if they were left alone, Harry confirmed his brother's suggestion. "Of course. I'll ask Pasha to serve breakfast up here. You can go off and do whatever you need to."

Remus smiled gratefully at Harry and opened the door before leading Lily up the corridor and into his bedroom.

She looked around in interest. "Nice room."

Remus closed the door. "I don't really think you want to talk about the room do you?"

Lily shook her head angrily. "I hate them. Amicus and his precious Master have taken both of my sons and my friend from me."

Remus pulled her close. "We're going to get through this."

Lily leant her face against Remus' bare chest. "I know but right now it doesn't feel that way."

Remus felt his body react to Lily's closeness, and not wanting to upset her, gently moved her away from him. "I think we should get on with dealing with the Dark Mark."

Suddenly aware of why Remus had probably moved her away, Lily blushed. "Turn around."

Remus did as he was told. Any lingering feelings of desire were soon driven away by the pain. "What are you doing?"

"Hush." Lily concentrated as she unwove the magical tendrils that linked the Dark Mark to Remus' spine and blood supply. "That will have to do for now."

"Exactly what have you done?" Remus opened his closet and pulled out a fresh shirt.

"Nothing major. The pull of the Dark Mark will be less now. You could actually ignore it if you want to." Lily couldn't help but watch as Remus got dressed. "But I can't disconnect the Dark Mark until Harry has been initiated. He needs you."

"What about Jamie?" Remus asked. "He's really suffering, Lily."

"I'm frightened to do anything until just before he gets ready to kill You-Know-Who." Lily told him.

"He won't be killing him, Lily." Remus hated being the bearer of more bad news. "Harry will."

"But...?" Lily was puzzled.

"Jamie's not the real Boy Who Lived, Harry is." Remus then told her of his suspicions.

"Jamie's really going to take it hard that it's not him." Lily couldn't believe the amount of bad news she was getting. "How is Harry handling it?"

"He hates it but he's dealing." Remus sat down at the small breakfast table. "We don't need to tell Jamie yet. In fact I think Harry would prefer it if we didn't tell Jamie at all. Harry wants no part of the fame that goes with the title."

Lily felt a little relieved. As much as she loved both of her sons, she knew how hurt Jamie had been to find out that Harry was actually going to inherit; to find out that he wasn't the real Boy Who Lived would probably send him over the edge. "I think that's probably a good idea." A silence fell between the two of them until Lily's stomach rumbled making her giggle.

Remus smiled. "Have you had breakfast yet?"

Lily shook her head. "I wasn't that hungry." Lily also sat down. "Remus, can I talk to you about something personal?"

Not really sure what Lily wanted to talk about, Remus nodded. "Of course."

"I think Sirius is having an affair." Lily said quietly.

"What makes you think that?" Remus couldn't believe Sirius would ever do that to his wife.

"He's never home. Last night he didn't even floo me to tell me he wouldn't be home." Lily sighed. "When I floored the hospital, Nigel said he'd left in the afternoon."

Remus was worried. "Have you seen him since?"

Lily nodded. "He got back early this morning." Lily looked worried. "He told me he'd slept at the hospital."

Remus sought to put Lily's mind at rest. "Nigel probably got it wrong." He put his hand over Lily's. "Sirius would never cheat on you, Lily."

Lily let out a huge sigh. "I'm just being daft, aren't I?" She smiled happily at Remus. "I should have known better. Thanks."

Remus moved his hand away. "Hey, what are friends for?" He called out for Pasha who soon appeared before turning to Lily. "Would you like to stay for breakfast?"

Lily smiled happily. "Suddenly I feel really hungry, so yes, I would."

The two of them ate breakfast before Lily got up. "I'm just going to check on Jamie before I head home."

Remus hugged her. "I'll look after him."

Lily laughed and shook her head. "If anyone had ever told me that I'd be grateful that you were a Death Eater, I'd have laughed in their faces." She sobered up. "But Remus, I am grateful for everything you're doing for both Jamie and Harry."

Remus tweaked Lily's nose affectionately. "I know you are. Now I think it's time you got back home before your other children run amok."

"They're not there." Lily told him. "Orion's staying with his friend Bas and Anna's at Goyle House."

Remus pulled a face. "What's she doing there?"

"Galton Goyle invited her." Lily sighed. "I couldn't believe it when Sirius said she could go."

"I shouldn't worry too much. Galton's not a bad kid. I'd be more concerned if you'd said she was staying with the Malfoys." Remus reassured Lily.

"That's never going to happen." Lily was adamant that her daughter was going nowhere the Malfoys.

Remus already knew where Cassie was, as the little girl and Scarlett, together with Auri, had gone to stay with the Delaneys until just before Harry's birthday. Scarlett had been excited to be finally meeting Draco's little sister and had talked about nothing else for several days before she went.

Lily checked the time. "I really must go. Thanks again for listening to me."

Remus waved off her thanks as he pulled open his bedroom door. "Anytime."

Lily walked out into the hallway only to run into Dudley. "Good morning, Dudley."

Dudley looked a little surprised. "Err, hello Aunt Lily."

Lily kissed her nephew on the cheek before hurrying off down the corridor towards Jamie's room.

Once she'd disappeared into one of the rooms, Dudley looked accusingly at his Dad. "Dad, why was Aunt Lily in your room?"

"She's working on my Dark Mark, Dudley, and then we had breakfast." Remus knew what was bothering his son. "I was hardly going to take off my shirt in the hallway."

Dudley relaxed. "Oh. Okay. Have you seen Harry?"

"He's around somewhere. I'll let him know you're looking for him if I see him." Remus informed his son as he opened his bedroom door back up. "Oh and Dudley, don't bother your Aunt Lily; she's trying to get some rest." Remus didn't want Dudley finding out about Jamie.

Dudley nodded. "I won't. I'm going to see if Luna's up yet."

"She'll meet you downstairs for breakfast." Remus' tone told Dudley that there was no way his son was going into Luna's bedroom to find out.

Dudley sighed. "I'll be downstairs then." With that Dudley headed down the staircase.

Once in his room Remus flopped tiredly onto his bed. "Bugger. Bugger. Bugger." As he lay there, he realized that he'd been kidding himself about still not being in love with Lily. After holding her, he knew that he was more in love with her than ever. His self-flagellation was, however, cut short by an owl pecking at his window. Getting up and opening it, Remus went pale as he recognized Amicus' eagle owl,

Victor. Having no choice he took the letter from Victor's leg and hurriedly ripped it open. After scanning its contents, Remus dismissed the bird and headed out of his bedroom.

Chapter 51: Harry's Worst Nightmare

18th July 1995

Remus could feel sweat coating his hands as he pushed open the door to Jamie's room.

Lily was about to step into the fireplace but halted at the sight of Remus' white face. "What's wrong?"

Remus handed her the letter. "Read it."

Harry and Jamie looked at each other, wondering what was going on.

Lily promptly burst into tears. "But he's supposed to have a few more weeks."

At her words, Harry began to shake. "He's brought it forward?"

Remus nodded. "I'm sorry. You've got until tomorrow."

"But Severus is supposed to be leaving for the States today." Harry reminded his Dad. "And he won't be back until Saturday."

Remus checked the time. "Harry, Severus will have already left. We can't get him back in time; the portkey travel would be too much for him." Remus knew that because of the training sessions, Harry and Severus had not only developed a mutual respect for each other but had also grown quite close. He wondered whether that was how the alternate Severus and Harry had become father and son. Knowing that Harry needed some reassurance, Remus put his arm around his son. "We're going to get through this, Harry."

"Dad. I can't do it on my own; I need him." Harry leant into the comfort of his Dad's embrace, even as he felt like running out and never returning. "I haven't even started practicing the killing curse yet." Harry's voice reflecting his panic. "I won't be ready in time."

"I'm going to make you ready." Remus promised. "I need you in the dueling room in fifteen minutes' time." When Harry hesitated, Remus

opened the door, and gently pushed him out. "Harry, please go get ready." Harry finally did as Remus asked.

Lily looked hopefully at Remus. "I want to stay."

Jamie jumped up off his bed. "I'm staying as well. I know how horrible it's going to be for him tomorrow. I want to help."

Remus could see that both of them were determined to remain. "If you do, you can't get upset. Harry's going to have a difficult enough time as it is. I need his focus on what we are going to be doing, not on someone else's distress."

"We understand." Lily wiped her face. "I'm just going to tell Sirius that Harry's not feeling very well and needs me."

Remus nodded brusquely. "Make sure he doesn't come to check on Harry. I don't want him here."

"Don't worry; I know just what to say." Lily hurried away.

Remus turned to Jamie. "I may as well tell you now. I'm going to be downright nasty to Harry if it doesn't look as if he's going to be able to do this with simple encouragement alone."

"I understand." Jamie didn't want Remus to refuse to let him stay.

"I don't think you do, Jamie." Remus told him. "Then again, it might be better you stay. It will give you some idea of exactly what you're going to have to go through when I train you to do this."

Jamie hid his elated grin at being allowed to remain. "I won't let you down, Uncle Remus."

"Get dressed then, and I'll see you upstairs." Remus then walked out to prepare the dueling room.

Two hours later

Harry had thought that Severus had been a hard taskmaster but he paled in comparison to his Dad. As Harry slid off his Dad's lap and onto the ground, for the first time in his life, Harry actually felt frightened of his Dad.

Remus snapped at his son. "Get up."

Harry struggled to his feet, resisting the urge to rub his bottom. "Can't we stop for a while?"

Remus ignored Harry's request, and nodded towards the small brown box. "Get over there and try it again."

Harry gritted his teeth and marched over to where a small rodent was frantically running up and down in the box, desperately trying to find a way out. So far Harry had been able to kill small insects and the like but had balked at killing anything bigger. Remus had subsequently gritted his own teeth, and forced himself to punish Harry every time he failed or refused. So far he'd held off using the Cruciatus but he knew that it might get to the stage where he'd have to.

Jamie stood beside the box. He whispered to Harry. "You can do it."

"Potter, get over here." Remus ordered. "Unless you want to sample a little of what your brother just went through."

Jamie hurried over to stand by his mother. Lily didn't even bother smiling to reassure Jamie. She now understood why Remus had wanted her promise not to get upset. She had never seen him act like this before, and knew that it was a sight that after today, she never wanted to witness again.

Raising his wand, Harry concentrated. "Avada Kedavra." Nothing happened.

"Again, Harry." Remus snapped. "If you don't do it this time, then we'll see how well you manage it with a few broken fingers to concentrate on as well." Remus knew that his threat was empty but he just hoped that Harry did not.

Angry and alarmed by Remus' threats, Harry closed his eyes and tried to let his anger flow out. "Avada Kedavra."

When Harry finally opened his eyes, the small rat lay stiff and unmoving in the box.

Remus hid his relief that Harry had at last succeeded. "We'll take a break now. You've got ten minutes." He walked out of the room and downstairs to his bedroom.

Lily smiled consolingly at Harry before following Remus. Reaching his bedroom door she knocked hesitantly.

"What is it?" Remus' sounded irritated at the interruption.

Lily put her head around the door. "Can I come in?"

"If you must." Remus didn't really want to see anyone.

"Remus..." Lily began hesitantly.

"If you're going to say that I'm being a bastard to Harry, then you're right. I am." Remus took a deep breath as he tried to calm himself.

"I wasn't." Lily put a hand tentatively on Remus' arm. "I was just going to ask if you wanted me to take over."

"Do you really think you could do it?" Remus snarled. "Put Harry under the Cruciatus? Because that's what's coming next if he doesn't obey me."

Lily sighed. "No, I don't think I could, but I can see that the idea of having to go that far is killing you."

"I've got to." Remus ran a hand through his hair. "If I don't and he's unprepared tomorrow, I don't know what Amicus might do to him."

Another knock sounded at the door. Remus marched over to the door and pulled it open. "Dudley, now is really not a good time."

“Dae’s downstairs.” Dudley wondered what was wrong; he’d never seen Remus wearing such a cold look on his face before.

“Send him up.” Remus then slammed the door in Dudley’s face.

A few moments later, Dae was standing in front of Remus. “With Severus being out of town, I thought I’d just drop by and see whether Harry needed any help with his practice.”

Remus was beyond glad to see his best friend. “You didn’t get the message I sent this morning?”

Dae shook his head. “I’ve not been into the Ministry. I’ve just gotten back from a long break in Paris with Anna.”

“Where is she?” Remus didn’t want Anna around as well; Lily was enough to deal with.

“At her father’s.” Dae could feel the tension in the room. He glanced at Lily before addressing Remus. “Did I come at a bad time?”

In answer, Remus opened his bedside drawer and took out the note that Amicus had sent him. “Read it.”

After perusing its contents, Dae passed the letter back to Remus. “Where’s Harry now?”

“He’s upstairs in the dueling room with his brother.” Lily told him.

“But I’ve just seen Dudley...” Dae began.

Remus shook his head. “She meant Jamie.”

“Jamie, as in the Boy Who Lived, Jamie?” Dae was confused. “What’s he doing here?”

“He’s supporting his brother.” Lily told Dae. “I’ll tell you more later. Right now we could do with your help. Remus isn’t coping too well with having to punish Harry. And Harry’s struggling with the killing curse.”

Dae frowned. "How far has Harry got?"

"A small rodent and I really had to push him to do that." Remus admitted.

"I'll take over, Remus." Dae knew that he could push Harry a lot further than Remus ever would. "You know my methods though. Would you prefer to stay down here?"

Remus shook his head. "I might not like watching but Harry needs me there."

"I'm coming too." Lily informed them.

Dae shook his head. "Absolutely not."

"But I've already sat in so far." Lily protested.

"I'm going to be a lot harsher than Remus." Dae warned her.

"I don't care." Lily protested. "I'm not leaving my son to go through this alone."

Dae knew that Lily had no real idea of how sadistic he could be if the situation called for it, and if what she'd said about Harry's struggles were true, Dae knew that things were probably going to get extremely ugly at some point. "If you come in, no matter what I do, do not interfere. If it comes down to the wire, then there's every chance I'll end up using you or Remus to get to Harry. Harry's got to believe that I'm capable of anything. Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you?"

Lily felt her stomach flop over as Dae's pleasant visage turned grim. "If it's the only way, then I'm willing to do anything for Harry."

"Let's get upstairs then." Dae pulled open the door and made his way to the dueling room, Lily and Remus following slowly behind.

Harry and Jamie were talking quietly together when the door opened. Harry's face lit up at the sight of Dae. "Hi Dae."

"Hello, Harry; Jamie." Dae smiled kindly; it was the last nice smile that Harry would be receiving from him until he'd finished his training.

Jamie was alarmed at the sight of Dae. "What's he doing here?"

Dae rolled up his sleeve. "Long story short. Former Death Eater; betrayed the Dark Lord; helping Harry."

"He's okay, Jamie." Harry reassured his brother. "Where's Dad?"

"Right here." Remus stepped into the room. Lily closed the door behind her.

"What's going on?" Harry asked.

"I'm taking over your training." Dae informed him.

Harry suddenly felt very nervous as he remembered how Dae had dealt with Peter in the cavern. As callous as Remus had been with him, Harry had at least got the measure of his Dad. Dae, on the other hand, was going to be a totally different ball game. "Err, okay." At the sight of Dae's scowl, Harry hurried to add a 'Sir' onto the end of his sentence.

Dae's face then became totally inscrutable, any signs of emotion now completely eradicated, as he told Harry what he expected of him. "When I tell you to do something, Lupin, you'll do it. Disobey me, and you will be punished. Unlike your over-sentimental father, I won't be handing out any second chances. Do you understand me?"

After what Remus had put Harry through already that morning, hearing Dae call his Dad 'over-sentimental' made Harry shiver even as sweat broke out on his forehead. "Yes, Sir."

"Good. Now over to the box and begin." Dae followed Harry across the room.

Twenty minutes later

Harry looked down at the litter of kittens he was expected to kill, and struggled not to cry as the small bundles of fur mewed piteously at him. "I'm not doing it."

"Wrong, Lupin." Dae backhanded Harry, almost knocking him over. "Kill them now."

Harry backed up against the wall, and defiantly shook his head. "No."

Remus felt Lily start as Dae advanced on Harry. He whispered softly to her. "He's got to, Lily."

They'd only just started, and already Lily didn't know how much more she could take. "But..."

Remus squeezed her shoulder. "Shut your eyes."

Lily did as Remus suggested, but in her mind's eye she could still see the vision of Harry backing away from Dae. "I'll be back shortly. I need a calming potion."

Remus watched as Lily left the room; he hoped for Harry's sake that she'd return. Dae didn't even bother to look over as the door closed behind Lily.

Harry winced as Dae grabbed him by the hair and pulled him back over to the box, before shoving his head inside until his face touched the soft balls of fur. "These are only kittens, Lupin. Tomorrow you're going to be taking a human life. If you can't do this now, how do you expect to be able to complete your task tomorrow?"

Harry wanted to vomit as he felt the small creatures brushing against his skin. "I don't want to do it."

"I don't care what you want." Dae snapped as he pulled Harry's head up out of the box. "Now do it."

Harry shook his head again. This time Dae didn't hesitate, and Harry cried out as a flaming cut appeared on his back. "Do it Lupin."

Again Harry refused, before screaming out in anguish as he felt one of his fingers break. "Please stop. I'll do it."

Jamie wished he could flee after his mother but he'd promised Harry he wouldn't leave him. Jamie looked away, closing his eyes, as the room was filled with the green light of death, again and again. When he felt able to look once more, the room was silent except for the sound of Harry's sobs as he wept over the bodies of the innocent creatures he'd just slaughtered.

Six hours later

By now, Harry wanted to lash out at Dae but was afraid of what he'd do to him if he did. "Please. I need a break."

"I really don't give damn what you need. This is about what I want." Dae lifted his wand and yet another flaming cut appeared on Harry's face. "And what I want is for you to take your wand and perform the curse again."

Harry had long given up trying to wipe away the tears that were sliding in an unending torrent down his face, stinging as they trickled over the cuts that Dae had inflicted upon him. His arms and chest were also covered in bloody cuts, he'd been put under the Cruciatus more times than he cared to mention and his left arm was dangling uselessly at his side. Harry half-heartedly aimed his wand at the large dog that just stood there, wagging its tail at him. "Avada.... I just can't." Harry collapsed onto the floor. "Go ahead, hurt me all you want to, but I'm not doing it."

Knowing he'd pushed Harry to his physical limit, Dae decided to go in another direction. He called Remus over before roughly grabbing him by the arm, and pushing him down onto the floor in front of Harry. Knowing what Dae was about to do and why, Remus didn't resist. "Kill it or for every failure or refusal you make from now on, I'll start punishing your father."

Harry shook his head. Dae promptly put Remus under the Cruciatus curse, watching impassively as Remus writhed and screamed under it. He then ended the curse. "Do it or I'll continue."

Harry sobbed as he looked over to where his Dad lay but he just couldn't bring himself to do it again. "I'm so sorry Dad but I can't face killing anything else."

Dae hid his worry at Harry's reluctance, and knew he was going to have to take Harry to the limits of his endurance about seeing others suffer. Dae was aware that Remus had told Harry that he'd built up some immunity to the pain of the Cruciatus, and that Harry probably felt secure in the knowledge that his Dad could pretty much take whatever was thrown at him, which was why Harry was still refusing to continue. However, Dae didn't think that Harry would feel the same way if it was Lily being made to suffer instead of his Dad.

His mind made up, Dae walked over to where Lily was standing next to Jamie. Immobilizing Jamie, he turned to face Lily who took a step back in alarm at the look on Dae's face. He stepped closer to her. "You should have listened to me when I warned you about what could happen in this room but you didn't." Lily whimpered in pain as Dae grabbed her forcibly by the throat before throwing her down onto the ground, and turning his wand on her. "Cru..."

As Dae had suspected, Harry wasn't able to stand by as Lily was being hurt. Climbing to his feet, Harry screamed at his tormentor. "I'll do it, I'll do it. Just don't hurt her." Dae lowered his wand, and lifted an eyebrow. "Well. I'm waiting."

Frightened that Dae would turn his attention back to Lily if he didn't get on with it, Harry raised his wand and shouted out the words of the killing curse. "Avada Kedavra." The dog became Harry's latest victim. Harry then swung back round to face Dae and Lily. Looking down to where Lily was still lying on the floor, Harry saw that fingerprint shaped bruises were already beginning to form on her throat, and his anger at Dae boiled over. Instead of waiting for Dae to urge him to move on, he strode up to the next container of his own accord, killing its occupant instantly. Several containers later, his anger was finally

spent, and, both physically and magically exhausted, Harry collapsed to the floor. "Please. No more."

Dae nodded at Remus who ran over to where Harry lay. "That's it, Harry. It's over."

Dae pulled Lily to her feet and healed her neck. "I'm sorry I had to hurt you, but I'd reached the stage where I knew that no matter what I did to Harry, he wasn't going to go on. After he refused to continue when I hurt Remus, you were my last option."

Lily rubbed her now healed throat as she watched Dae release Jamie. "I know you warned me but I didn't expect you to be quite so rough."

An angry Jamie scowled at Dae. "If you ever touch my Mum again, I'll kill you."

Dae knew that that was unlikely to happen but respected the fact that Jamie had had the courage to threaten him at all. "I'm sorry, Jamie. It won't happen again."

Lily pulled Jamie close to her. "Jamie, Dae had already warned me about what might happen. If Dae had had to put me under the Cruciatus a dozen times, then I would have let him. I'd do anything for you or Harry."

"I know that, but it doesn't mean I have to like it." As he hugged his mother, Jamie scowled at Dae, who promptly walked off.

Dae strode over to where the containers had been set up in a long row. Pulling out his wand, he began to cast spell after spell on their contents.

Despite his resentment at what Dae had done to his mother and brother, Jamie was curious to see exactly what Dae was doing. Joining Dae on the other side of the room, Jamie steeled himself to look inside the container that had held the kittens. He gasped. "They weren't real?"

Dae shook his head. "The insects and rodents were though." Dae smiled ruefully. "I may have seemed like an out and out callous bastard today but even I draw the line at killing innocent animals. I knew that Severus had planned to transfigure the creatures Harry was going to have to kill, and I just hoped that Remus had gone the same way."

Jamie looked over to where Harry was sobbing into Remus' chest. "What would have happened if Harry had known that they were only stuffed toys?"

"He would have breezed through the test." Dae could see his response was confusing Jamie, and he hastened to explain. "Harry wouldn't have put in the effort needed to produce a true killing curse. To perform the spell, as with the Cruciatus, you have to channel your negative emotions into your magic. When tomorrow comes, if he hadn't been pushed as he was today, Harry would either have found nothing happening or he'd become too distressed to kill someone."

Jamie suddenly understood why Lily had offered to make the sacrifice she had. "Harry wouldn't have been able to do it if you hadn't hurt Mum, would he, Sir?"

Dae shook his head. "No, Jamie, he wouldn't have. I know today seemed harsh but it was necessary. Harry had to truly want to kill to master the spell."

Jamie was still a little confused. "But he didn't want to truly kill anything; he said he didn't."

"I pushed Harry over the edge by hurting Lily." Dae explained. "He truly wanted to kill at that moment, but it was me he wanted to kill, not the animals he turned his anger on."

Jamie shuddered. "I'm not looking forward to being taught this by Uncle Remus but at least I'll be able to understand why he'll be doing what he's going to."

Dae frowned. "Why are you going to be taught this?"

Jamie could have kicked himself at his slip but as Harry had vouched for Dae, Jamie took off his sock and shoe and showed Dae the Dark Mark that marred the base of his foot. "I'm a Death Eater as well."

Shocked, Dae realized that Jamie was a member of Voldemort's guard. "You're more than that though, aren't you?"

Jamie nodded. "Unfortunately, I am." He put his sock and shoe back on before holding out his hand to Dae. "Thanks for doing this for my brother."

Dae glanced across to where Harry was being comforted by Remus. "Thanks Jamie. I just hope Harry understands why I did what I did."

Across the room, once Harry's sobs had abated, Remus lifted his son up. "Let's get you out of here."

Dae moved to open the door as Remus carried Harry towards it. As they went by, Harry looked across at him. "Thanks, Dae."

Dae shook his head. "Only you could thank someone at a time like this."

"We'll be in my room." Not giving Harry a chance to say anything else to Dae, Remus strode out, Lily hurrying after him.

Dae turned to Jamie. "Let's give them a little time. You can tell me exactly how you managed to get embroiled in this sorry mess."

Jamie sat down and began to tell Dae what had happened to him.

Reaching his room, Remus wandlessly opened the door before turning to Lily. "Can you run a bath please?"

Lily hurried into the bathroom and started the bath, before returning to where Remus was cradling Harry in his arms. "Do you want me to leave?"

Harry weakly shook his head. "Don't go, Maman."

"I won't then." Lily then pulled out her wand and began to heal the numerous cuts that covered Harry's body. "I'm not too good with broken bones."

A small pinging sound alerted them to the fact that the bathtub was full. Getting up slowly, so as not to jar Harry's broken arm, Remus carried his son into the bathroom and lowered him carefully into the bubble strewn bathtub. He then took out his wand to vanish Harry's clothes before aiming his wand at Harry's arm. "This is going to hurt, Harry."

Harry nodded weakly. "It can't hurt much worse than it does right now."

At Harry's words, Remus cast the spell to fix Harry's arm and broken fingers, wincing slightly as Harry went whiter than he already was. "Grab him."

Lily reached out and grabbed Harry by his good arm as her son passed out. "We'd better enervate him. He needs to take a pain killing potion."

Remus fetched the potion before the returning to the room and enervating his son. "Harry, you need to take this."

Harry let out a sigh of relief as the potion immediately went to work. "Dad, you don't need to watch over me. I feel much better now."

Understanding that Harry wanted some privacy, Remus set up a ward to warn him in case Harry passed out again and slipped beneath the water. Back in his room, Remus collapsed into a chair and dropped his head into his hands.

Lily moved over to where Remus was sitting. "It's going to be okay, Remus."

Remus looked up at Lily, tears in his eyes. "No, Lily, it's fucking not. Dae and I had to put my son through hell today because of that bastard's demands. And tomorrow, my son's going to be put through hell all over again, before being forced to give up his soul to a

madman. It's not fucking fair." Remus lashed out at the books and glasses that were sitting on the table next to him.

Ignoring the broken glass and damaged books that now lay scattered over the floor, Lily slipped onto Remus' lap and wrapped her arms around him before pulling his head onto her shoulder. As Lily comforted him, Remus came totally undone and began to weep; huge sobs that wracked his entire body. Lily rubbed his back and murmured soft, soothing, unintelligible words until eventually Remus' shudders stopped. Lily didn't move away. "Remus, what can I do to help?"

Remus got up and gently set Lily down. "You've done more than enough already." A knock sounded at the door.

Lily hugged Remus before letting him go. "I'll get it." Lily opened the door to find Dae standing there. "Come in."

Dae stepped into the room, immediately noticing the mess. He knew without asking what had happened. "Can I speak to Harry?"

Lily nodded towards the bathroom. "You can go in; he's soaking in the tub."

Dae knocked on the door. At Harry's beckoning, he walked into the bathroom. "Hello Harry."

Harry smiled hesitantly. "Dae, you don't have to say anything. I know why you pushed me so hard today."

"Even though it was necessary, it still doesn't make me feel any better about what I've done though." Dae sat down on the side of the bathtub.

"If you hadn't had done what you did, I'd never have managed it." Harry admitted. "I just wanted to crawl away and hide. I didn't want to kill anything."

"I know that." Dae ran a hand over Harry's head.

Harry sighed. "Dad wouldn't have been able to go that far, would he?"

Dae shook his head. "No he wouldn't. Remus might be able to be ruthless to others but I think he was close to cracking when I arrived."

Harry gave a ghost of a smile. "Until today, Dad has never lifted a finger to me."

Dae was a little taken aback by Harry's comment. "But I thought he'd used the Cruciatus on you before."

Harry realized that Dae didn't know what Remus had done. "He only did that because I forced him to. He didn't actually use the Cruciatus on me at all today; instead he stuck me over his knee and spanked me to try and get me to do as I was told. Even that was really hard for him to do, wasn't it?" Lying in the tub, Harry had heard angry voices, before the sound of smashing glass and then the sound of a man weeping, had reached his ears.

"You heard what went on next door then?" Dae had guessed from Remus' red eyes that he'd been crying.

Harry nodded. "It was difficult not to." Despite everything Dae had put him through, Harry couldn't help but be glad that Dae had been the one to do it, and not his Dad. "Dae, thanks for being here. I know it can't have been much easier for you but you saved Dad from having to go through that."

"It was hard, Harry but I care a great deal about Remus, and I'd do anything to help your Dad." Dae was telling the truth, although he'd never expected that torturing his best friend's son would be something that he'd ever be called upon to do.

Harry shivered as the water started to cool. "Can you tell Dad that I'll be out in a minute?"

Dae stood up. "I'll be in the other room."

Harry watched as his Dae left the room before pulling himself out of the bathtub, and slipping into the pajamas that Pasha had somehow

known to bring him. Tired, he closed his eyes and leant against the wall.

After five minutes had gone by, Remus looked at Dae who frowned. "He said he'd be finished in a minute."

"I'm going to check on him." With that, Remus pushed open the door.

Harry was fast asleep when Remus walked in. Smiling sadly, Remus picked Harry up and carried him to his bed. "I'm going to let him sleep here tonight. I've got a horrible feeling his nightmares are likely to return after what we've put him through."

Lily pulled back the covers and Remus gently lowered Harry onto the bed before covering him over. He then stood looking down at his sleeping son. "You know, I couldn't love him more; not even if he was my own biological child."

"I know that, Remus." Lily slipped her hand into Remus. "I'm just glad that he ended up with you and Nia as his parents, and not someone else."

"What Dumbledore did must still hurt you even now." Remus pulled Lily over to the sofa before casting a silencing spell around the area so that they wouldn't disturb Harry. Dae took the chair opposite and listened quietly to the conversation.

"To be honest it does." Lily admitted. "I know Harry calls me Maman but I wish that, just once, he'd call me Mum. Speaking of Mum, where's Jamie?"

Dae gave his first genuine smile of the day. "He's in his bedroom feeding his face."

Remus shuddered. "Food's the last thing I want right now but I wouldn't say no to a glass of scotch. Lily, Dae, would you both like some wine?"

Lily nodded. "After the shit we've been through today, I feel as if I want to lose myself in the bottom of a bottle, to say nothing of a glass."

Dae also nodded. "Lily's right. It's been a bloody awful day. I'll get French."

Remus grinned as French appeared without Dae even calling out.

The small elf was carrying a tray. He turned to Lily. "Red wine for you Miss Lily, and Scotch for Mr. Remus and Master Dae." French then bowed before disappearing.

Lily gratefully swallowed a mouthful of the mellow, slightly warm, red wine. "I so needed that."

Remus took a mouthful his own drink before turning to Lily. "I never asked. How exactly did you get Sirius not to come and see Harry?"

Lily giggled. "You might have forgotten but even though he's a healer, Sirius can't stand the sight of good old-fashioned vomit. He had a real hard time when the children were small and throwing up on him. He used to end up being sick himself. I told him that Harry has muggle stomach flu."

Remus smiled. "I had forgotten." Remus then burst out laughing. "I really should have remembered. James once got totally plastered after we'd snuck out to Hogsmeade to the pub. When he got back he was so drunk he ended up throwing up all over Sirius. Sirius then returned the favor."

Dae and Lily both joined in with Remus' laughter, glad of the respite after a distressing and grueling day. Lily smiled softly. "James usually could hold his drink. He must have had a heck of a lot to drink to have been sick."

"He had." Before continuing with the next part of the story, Remus had the good grace to blush as he didn't like to remind Lily of someone who had dated James before she had. "I don't know if you remember, but Mary Crouch threw him over for a Hufflepuff. He

decided to mend his broken heart at the bottom of a bottle. I'm surprised Rosmerta agreed to serve us." Remus then became serious. "Do you ever miss James?"

Lily nodded. "Occasionally but not as much as I used to. After such a long time, his memory has faded somewhat."

"I sometimes feel guilty." Remus admitted. "That I'm still here with his son, and he's not had the chance to see what a wonderful kid Harry's turned out to be."

Dae reached over and punched Remus in the arm. "I think it's time for a change of subject. You're going to send us over the edge if you keep up with the melancholic reminiscences."

Remus smiled ruefully. "Sorry. It's just that after today, I'm feeling a little that way."

Harry suddenly began screaming. Remus sighed and put down his glass of scotch. "This is pretty much what I expected."

Dropping the silencing spell, Remus moved over to Harry and gently shook him. "Harry, wake up."

At first Remus didn't think Harry was going to respond. "Dad?"

"Was it a vision?" Remus asked gently.

Harry shook his head. "Just a bona fide nightmare. I think I'm a little stressed out about tomorrow."

"Would you like a dreamless sleep potion?" Remus asked gently.

Harry nodded. "If I can."

Lily started to walk towards the door. "Where do you keep them?"

Remus pulled open his drawer. "Here."

Harry gratefully swallowed the proffered potion and was asleep again within seconds.

Remus threw the empty vial into the trash can at the side of the bed. "He'll sleep until breakfast."

"I don't want to go home." Lily couldn't face leaving Harry.

"You can stay here if you want to." Remus offered. "I'll take Harry's room."

Lily was surprised at Remus' offer. "I'd have thought you'd want to stay here with him tonight."

"I do but..." Remus didn't want to make Lily feel uncomfortable.

"I'm just going to floo Sirius and tell him I'm staying with Harry." Lily left the room.

Dae put down his glass of scotch. "Is there something going on here I don't know about?"

Remus shook his head. "No. Lily's just worried about Harry."

Dae looked concernedly at his friend. "You're not over her, are you?"

Remus didn't bother to deny it. "I thought I was but this morning I found out that I'd been kidding myself." Remus sighed. "This morning seems so long ago now."

Knowing now how Remus felt again about Lily, Dae apologized to his friend. "I'm sorry I hurt Lily today."

"I almost undid everything you'd done for Harry when I saw you grab her. If Harry hadn't have called out, I think I would have blown everything. When you seized hold of Lily, I wanted to get up and rip your throat out with my bare hands for touching her. Actually, I've had to hold myself back all afternoon." Remus admitted.

"I have to be honest." Dae told him. "I half-expected you to attack me at some point. I made sure to keep eye on you, just in case you did."

Remus then told Dae why he hadn't. "You're lucky. If I hadn't marked you as part of my pack, then I probably would have. It was difficult for me to stand back while you tormented Harry."

"I'm glad you marked me then." Dae put a hand on Remus' arm. "You won't pull a stunt like Leo did with Lily, will you?" Dae didn't think Remus would but he wanted to make sure his friend would be alright.

"I've managed for this long without doing that, so I think I'll get through tonight." Remus smiled at his friend. "Will you stay?"

"Of course. I'll sort a room out myself. Stay with Harry." Dae pulled Remus into a brief hug instead of shaking his hand as he normally did. "Goodnight, Rem."

"Night Dae." Remus closed the door behind Dae and headed into the bathroom, taking the opportunity to slip into some pajamas and a robe.

When he came out, Lily was sitting on the bed. She giggled at the sight of him. "I'd never have pegged you as the pajamas and robe type."

Remus scowled. "I shouldn't laugh too loud. There's a spare pair and a robe for you in the bathroom."

Lily held up her right arm. "Sirius sent me my own things, but thanks."

Remus lay down beside Harry and waited for Lily to return.

After her shower, Lily opened the bedroom door to say something to Remus, only to find out that he'd fallen asleep. Covering him up, she slipped into the bed on the other side of her son.

Remus awoke in the dark. He wondered why someone was in his bed and then realized it was Harry. Quietly getting up, he made his way

into his sitting room, only to discover Lily was already there eating a sandwich. "Couldn't you sleep?"

Lily held up the sandwich. "We missed dinner last night; I was hungry."

"And you couldn't sleep, could you?" Remus thought Lily looked worn out.

She shook her head. "I tried but it's difficult when I know what Harry's going to have to go through."

"I feel such a heel lying to him." Remus kept his voice low. "He's going to hate us for it."

"I know that, but it's for the best, Remus." Lily told him. "We can't tell him the truth now."

Remus opened up the door. "I'm going down to the library. Can you stay with Harry?"

Lily nodded. "I'll go lie down next to him."

The Next Morning

Harry awoke feeling groggy and tired. He wondered why he was in his Dad's bedroom. When he rolled over he was surprised to find a pajama clad Lily asleep next him. Not wanting to wake her, Harry got carefully out of bed and headed for the bathroom. When he returned, Lily was still sleeping, so Harry made his way downstairs.

As he entered the dining room, he found Remus sitting up nursing a cup of tea. "Good morning, Dad."

Remus looked miserable. "Morning Harry."

"Are you alright?" Harry laid a hand on his Dad's.

"I think it should be me asking you that." Remus looked up. "About yesterday, Harry."

"Dad, forget it." Harry knew that Remus had only done what he'd had to.

"I can't." Remus protested. "I just want you to know that I hated every minute of it."

Harry squeezed his Dad's hand. "I know you didn't mean it."

"But you flinched when I went to hug you yesterday." Remus pointed out.

Harry realized that despite his protestations otherwise, Remus thought that Harry resented him for what he'd done. "Dad, I only flinched because of my broken arm; it wasn't anything to do with you." Remus still didn't look convinced. Harry sighed. "Dad, it really is okay. Look at this way, Dae did some pretty shit things to me as well and I'm still talking to him."

"I'm glad to hear it." Dae's voice interrupted him.

Harry swung round. "Dae, what are you doing here? I thought you'd gone home."

Dae shook his head. "I'm not leaving until you return safely."

Harry felt comforted by Dae's presence despite what the man had put him through the previous day. "Thanks." Harry then sat down and attempted to eat some breakfast, but after several failed attempts, finally gave up. "I really can't eat anything."

At that moment, Luna strolled in and took one look at the miserable faces, before flopping into a chair. "So, it's today, is it?"

Harry loved Luna's directness. "Yes, but I don't know when."

"Morning." Lily ambled into the dining room still clad in her pajamas and robe. "Harry, sweetie, how are you feeling?"

"I'm okay, Maman." Harry got up and hugged Lily.

Luna was about to ask what Lily was doing in her pajamas, when yet another person wandered in.

Jamie stopped dead as he soon as he saw Luna. "Err, morning."

"Morning, Jamie." Harry greeted his brother.

Luna looked surprised. "I didn't see this coming."

Jamie yawned. "We'll tell you later about it later." He looked over at his mother. "What time is it?"

Lily gasped as she checked the time. "It's 9.50. I didn't think I'd sleep this late."

Harry frowned. "What's wrong?"

"Get your things and come straight back down." Remus instructed.

Harry blanched as he realized that he probably didn't have much time until he had to leave. "It's soon isn't it?"

Remus had wanted to wait until the last possible moment to tell Harry. "Yes."

Harry hurried out of the room to get his cloak and mask, his stomach churning wildly.

Dudley ran into him on the stairs. "Have you seen Luna? She was going to fetch some juice and come back upstairs."

"Dining room." Harry struggled to get the words out.

"Harry, what's wrong?" Dudley grabbed his brother's arm.

Unable to speak, Harry just shook his head and pulled free. Dudley followed Harry into his Dad's bedroom and watched as Harry opened the closet and removed the mask. "Shit."

Harry smiled shakily. "That just about covers it."

Dudley didn't attempt to hug Harry as he could see that his brother was close to breaking. "I wish I could do this for you."

Remus poked his head around the door. "We've got to go Harry."

"I'll just be a minute, Dad." Harry picked up his cloak and shook his brother's hand. "Thanks Dudley but I'd rather it was me doing it than you."

Harry went through the door and headed downstairs. When he reached the bottom of the stairs, Harry found everyone waiting for him. "I'll see you all later then."

Dae pulled Harry into a hug. "Don't do anything stupid, okay."

Luna couldn't hide her tears. "We'll be waiting."

Harry struggled to hold onto his own composure. "Thanks."

Jamie couldn't say anything, and Harry suddenly found himself sandwiched between his brother and Lily. Unable to deal with it, he pulled free. "I'm sorry but I just can't right now."

Remus walked up with a wand in his hand. "You're going to need this."

Harry slipped it into his empty holster. "I'm ready."

Remus held out his arms and Harry immediately went into them. "I'll take care of you."

"I'm sorry you've got to do this for me." Harry took a deep breath and stepped back. "We'd better be off."

Harry felt Remus put a hand on his shoulder, and the pair apparated to the destination that Remus had chosen. On arrival Harry began to shake, as the realization of what he was about to do hit him full force. "I'm not sure I can do this, Dad."

Remus hid his own panic and snapped at his son. "Harry Lupin, you're going to take a deep breath and you're going to do exactly the same as you did yesterday. Do you understand?"

Harry tried to relax as he unholstered his wand. "Yes, Sir."

Remus didn't dare touch Harry; he knew that Harry would feel him trembling if he did. He swallowed hard before giving Harry his instructions. "There's no set target. I simply want you to kill the first muggle that comes up that street."

Harry couldn't answer and just nodded to show that he'd understood his Dad's command. He then began to pray that no-one would come up the street. Unfortunately his prayers went unanswered as within a few minutes a woman appeared in the distance.

Harry felt panic rising inside of him again. "I thought I could do it, but I really can't."

Remus knew he had to be ruthless. "Tell me, Harry, how are you going to explain to Lily and Sirius why they and their children are going to die?"

Harry shook his head. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. But I just can't, Dad."

Taking a different tack, Remus shrugged as if he wasn't bothered. "If you don't want to do it, then I'll take you back now." He then placed his hand on Harry's shoulder and looked Harry in the eye, before trying one last time to persuade him to change his mind, sarcasm dripping off every word he spoke. "I've no doubt that Amicus will understand. However, I'm not so sure your mother will when she has to watch me transform before taking the lives of our children one by one."

Backed into a corner by the truth in Remus' words and having no-one else to vent his fear and anger on, Harry turned on his Dad. "At least I know now why you've got where you have in His ranks." He then span round to face the street, not noticing the tears that filled Remus' eyes.

Not looking at Remus again, Harry waited for the woman to reach him before angrily speaking the words he'd hoped never to direct at another human being. "Avada Kedavra." He watched as green light illuminated the area before the woman slumped to the ground.

Remus put his hand on Harry's shoulder in preparation for apparating away. "We can go now."

Harry shrugged off Remus' hand. "Get off me." Harry felt his stomach threatening to revolt and took deep breaths, trying to avoid looking at the woman who now lay dead on the floor in front of him.

"Harry, put on your mask. We've got to go." Remus replaced his hand on Harry's shoulder as Harry did as he was told. He was relieved when Harry didn't pull away.

Harry was terrified of receiving the Dark Mark, and could feel his legs shaking as he and Remus apparated to the Dark Lord's home. As soon as they arrived, Harry pulled free of Remus' grasp. "I can manage."

Remus was glad of the mask he wore as he followed Harry to the Dark Lord's antechamber. At the door he stopped. "You're to go on without me." Remus then turned, left and disappeared around the corner.

Alone, Harry entered the room Remus indicated and found himself not in front of Voldemort, but facing Amicus instead. "Harry, please remove your mask."

Harry did as he was told, and Amicus grabbed his chin and looked into his eyes. "Well done. I wasn't sure if you had it in you or not." Amicus could feel Harry's tremors as he held his chin, and not wanting Harry to become ill, passed the boy a potion. "It will settle your stomach."

Harry tentatively took the potion from Amicus and swallowed it, hoping that it truly was only something to settle his stomach, and not something more sinister. It was. "What happens now?"

“Normally you’d get your Dark Mark from my Master, but as you are to be my apprentice, it is I who shall be marking you.” Amicus pulled out his wand. “Kneel.”

Harry backed away. “No.”

Amicus couldn’t believe that Harry was defying him. “I suggest you do it now or be prepared to suffer the consequences.”

Harry shook his head. “I’m not binding myself to you unless I know who I’m serving.”

“Why should I tell you?” Amicus couldn’t believe it was so important to Harry that he’d risk his own life to defy him.

“I know who your Master truly is, why shouldn’t I ask the same from you?” Harry countered.

Amicus thought for a moment. “Are you really sure you want to know?”

Harry nodded. “Yes.”

Amicus agreed. “Fair enough, but first you will take my Mark.”

Harry again shook his head. “Not until I know who you are.”

“I give you my word that I’ll tell you after you take the Mark.” Amicus promised. “Now kneel and swear allegiance to me, body and soul.”

With Amicus’ promise ringing in his ears, Harry did as he was told; his shaking now becoming more pronounced. “Bend your head.” Harry inclined his head and Amicus placed the tip of his wand on Harry’s nape. “Morsmordre.”

As the spell began, Harry finally understood what Remus had tried to tell him about how taking the Dark Mark felt. Never before had Harry ever experienced so many conflicting feelings at once: triumph, despair, pain, desecration, disgust and relief flooded through him.

Harry couldn't believe he was feeling relief but he was; relief that the waiting was finally over. Harry bit through his lip as pain coursed through him and he struggled not to drop screaming to the floor. Eventually, however, the pain became too much and Harry couldn't help but scream aloud. After what seemed like an eternity, his ordeal finally came to an end.

Amicus was pleased at Harry's fortitude. "You may stand."

Resisting the temptation to scratch his hairline, Harry swayed as he got to his feet.

Amicus handed over a glass of firewhiskey. "Trust me. You'll feel better for it."

Harry took it and knocked it back, hoping that it would help to dull the pain.

Amicus took the empty glass back from the coughing boy, and refilled it. "Believe me. You're going to need it."

Harry took the glass back. "What now?"

"Now you will swear an oath not to reveal my identity to anyone." Amicus told him.

Harry interrupted him. "What if they already know who you are?"

"Then you can, of course, discuss me with them." Amicus told him. "However, as only my Master, Bella and Lamia know my true identity, there aren't too many people that you're really going to be able to discuss me with.

"Who is Lamia?" Harry hoped Amicus would tell him.

"She'll tell you if she wants you to know, Harry." Amicus then continued to tell Harry what the other conditions of the oath were. "I also want you to swear never to take up arms against me unless invited to do so, and finally, you will pledge to defend me with your life."

"Agreed." Harry knew he sounded more confident than he felt.

"Last chance, Harry." Amicus stood up. "Are you sure that you really want to know?"

Harry nodded. "I am."

"Swear the oath then." Amicus demanded.

Harry did as Amicus ordered.

As Harry finished, Amicus sat down on Voldemort's throne. "So is there anything else you want to know before I show you who I am?"

Harry thought for a moment, before shaking his head. "No."

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Amicus then pulled off his mask.

Harry went white and backed away. "Oh Merlin, no."

Sorry this chapter took so long but it was probably the hardest chapter I've ever had to write.

Next chapter: Should be up by Tuesday or Wednesday of next week.

Chapter 52: Unmasked

22nd July 1995

Hermione brushed off her cloak as she stepped into the hallway. Spotting Remus she smiled. "Where's Harry?"

"He's upstairs in the dueling room." Remus could sense Hermione's excitement at seeing Harry again. "Isn't Severus with you?"

"Papa will be here tomorrow. Mama was feeling a little unwell, and he didn't want to leave her alone." Hermione explained. "I'll just go and say hi to Harry."

Before Remus had a chance to say anything else, Hermione darted up the stairs. As she reached the top floor, she slowed to a more sedate pace. Brushing down her hair, she pushed open the door, only to grind to a halt at the sight of Harry and Jamie Potter facing each other down. "Err, hello."

Both boys swung round to face the door. Harry lowered his wand. "Hermione, hi."

Hermione walked into the room. "Hello Harry." She ignored Jamie who returned the gesture.

Harry whispered something to his brother that Hermione couldn't hear, and Jamie left the room. "What's going on Harry?"

"Nothing. I was just practicing my dueling with Jamie." Harry walked over to where a small table held soft drinks.

Hermione moved closer to him and gasped. "What the hell have you been doing?"

Harry was puzzled. "What do you mean?"

"Have you seen yourself?" Hermione grabbed Harry by the arm and dragged him over to the mirrored section of the dueling room.

Harry didn't appear surprised to find that the clear green of his eyes had vanished; they were now pure black. "Dae warned me if I practiced the Anima Abigo curse too much, this might happen."

"Dae's been teaching you Dark Magic?" At Harry's nod, Hermione frowned. "But I thought that Papa had taught you everything your father thought you needed to know, except for the killing curse."

"He had, until I was told I needed to learn the Anima curse." Harry started to walk back towards the table.

Hermione began to feel alarmed. "What's going on, Harry?"

Harry stopped, bent down and parted his hair. "I've already taken the Dark Mark, Hermione."

Hermione reached out to touch it, only for Harry to pull away. "When?"

"The day after you and Severus left for New Orleans." Harry got up and finished making his way back over to the table, before calmly pouring himself an orange juice. "Is there anything else?"

Hermione grabbed him by the arm. "What is wrong with you? Why are you acting liking this?"

"Actually, I think we should be break up." Harry took a mouthful of his orange juice, and watched coolly as Hermione's face fell.

"Why, Harry?" Hermione felt sick at how coldly Harry was treating her.

"Because you're a distraction, Hermione. I need to concentrate on what I'm doing, and I can't do that why you're around." Harry put down his glass.

"But I can help. I'm supposed to be your dueling partner." Hermione pointed out.

"I've got Jamie now; I don't need you." Harry turned his back on Hermione and began to walk into the center of the room. "You can tell Jamie he can come back in if he's outside."

Hermione struggled to contain her tears. "Don't do this, Harry."

"I'm sorry, Hermione but I've got to get on." Harry unholstered his wand and looked meaningfully at the door.

Not knowing what else to do, Hermione decided to leave, and had just put her hand on the handle to open the door, when Harry's voice stopped her. "And Hermione?"

Expectantly she turned back round. "Yes, Harry?"

"You can tell Severus that I don't need his help anymore either." Harry then ignored Hermione as he began practicing his wand movements.

In tears, Hermione pulled open the door and found Jamie standing there. Unable to speak, she simply pushed by him and fled towards the staircase.

Jamie walked back into the room to find his brother practicing. "What did you do to Snape?"

"I just finished with her." Harry motioned towards the center of the room.

"But I didn't know you were even going out with her. I thought she was engaged to Dae." Jamie pulled out of his wand and took up his position.

"She was. Anyway it doesn't matter now." Harry assumed a dueling stance. "I've got better things to do than talk about Hermione."

Recognizing that their discussion was over, Jamie began. "Reducto."

Hermione ran downstairs, only to cannon into Remus. "Whoa. What's the hurry?"

Hermione looked up, tears streaming down her face. "Harry just broke up with me."

Remus put his arm around Hermione and drew her into his study. "Come with me."

Hermione shook her head. "I'm going home."

Remus led her over to the fireplace. "In that case, I'm coming with you."

Hermione held Remus' arm as the two of them floored to Snape Manor. On arrival, a coach was standing waiting, and the two of them got in. Hermione then turned to Remus. "What's wrong with Harry? It's almost as if he hasn't got any emotions." She shuddered. "He was so cold to me."

"He's pretty much been like this ever since he got back from being marked." Remus sat down opposite Hermione. "I presume he told you that he'd taken it already."

Hermione nodded. "He showed me. But why did it look different from yours?"

"Amicus marked him, not the Dark Lord." Remus watched as surprise flitted across Hermione's face.

"Remus, why is Potter there?" Hermione couldn't understand how the two brothers had suddenly become friends.

Remus didn't really want to betray Jamie's confidence about what had happened to his nephew without Jamie's permission, but knew that he might have to. "It's complicated, Hermione."

The coach pulled up outside the main house and Severus came hurrying out, surprised to see Hermione back so soon. "What's wrong?"

“Harry.” Remus’ exasperated look was enough to alert Severus to the fact that Harry had somehow upset his daughter.

Severus led the way up the steps. “Let’s go to my study.” He pulled Hermione into a brief hug. “Do you want to come, or would you like to go and sit with your mother?”

Hermione could see that Severus was still concerned about Virginie’s health, and, as much as she wanted to find out the reason behind Harry’s behavior, she decided to put her mother first. “I’ll go sit with Mama. You can fill me in later.”

The two men made their way to Severus’ study, before Severus turned to Remus. “So what’s he done?”

Remus filled Severus in on what Hermione had told him, and on how Harry had been acting towards him. “I just don’t know what’s up with him.”

“Do you think it’s got something to do with taking the Dark Mark?” Severus asked.

Remus pulled a face. “I think so, but I don’t know why. I’d better tell you what happened after Harry got back.”

Grimmauld Square

Remus paced up and down. Dae got up and put a hand on his friend’s arm. “Calm down. He should be back soon.”

“What if something went wrong? What if he panicked and decided he didn’t want to take the Mark? What if...” Remus’ rant was cut off in mid-sentence as a sharp crack signaled someone arriving home.

Remus went running out into the hallway. “Harry, is that you?”

Harry didn’t answer as his legs gave way from under him. Remus shot forward and grabbed his son before he could hit the floor. “I’ve got you.”

Remus lifted Harry and carried him into the sitting room, before gently lowering him onto the sofa where Lily and the others were waiting for him. Remus pulled out a calming potion. "Drink this; it will help you to relax."

Harry shook his head. "I don't want to relax. I need to speak to Dae alone."

Dae turned to the others. "Clear out."

Remus baulked at leaving his son but Lily slipped her hand into his. "Just because Harry needs Dae right now, it doesn't mean that he doesn't need you as well."

Remus recognized the truth in Lily's words. However, he still didn't want to leave Harry but after looking at Harry's pleading face, he left the room and closed the door behind him.

Once the others had left, Dae invoked several wards before kneeling down in front of Harry. "He told you, didn't he?"

A Short Time Later

"Let me get the others." Dae cancelled the wards and went to tell everyone they could come back in.

Remus walked up to where Harry was sitting. "First of all, I want to apologize for being so cruel to you this morning. I was afraid you'd back out."

Harry couldn't look at his Dad. "If you hadn't have threatened me, then I would have."

Remus could see that Harry hadn't forgiven him for what he'd said. He knew that what he was about to tell him probably wouldn't help matters either. "Harry, you're not going to like this."

Lily looked supportively at Remus before he continued speaking. "You know that you thought you'd killed the Muggle woman?"

Harry finally looked up at his Dad. "What do you mean? Thought I killed?"

Remus knelt down in front of Harry. "Harry, you didn't kill anyone."

Harry shook his head disbelievingly. "Dad, you don't need to try and make me feel better."

"I'm not, Harry." Remus stood up and took the two wands that Lily had been holding. "These are both yours." He held up the holly wand. "This is your customized Ollivander wand." He then held out the other wand. "You might want to take a look at this."

Harry climbed to his feet and took the proffered wand from Remus. "This looks like my dueling wand." He unholstered the wand he'd thought he'd killed the Muggle with. "But so does this."

Remus took the wand that Harry had just unholstered. "This is a wand I had Lily adapt especially for today."

"What do you mean?" Harry didn't understand where Remus was going with the whole wand thing.

"You only stunned the woman, Harry." Remus informed him as he passed the wand to Lily, who took several steps back.

"But I said the words, and I saw the green light." Harry argued.

"I modified the wand, Harry." Lily took aim at Remus. "Avada Kedavra."

Jamie cried out in horror as Harry threw himself in front of the spell. "You've killed Harry."

Dudley pulled his wand on Lily, only for Remus to shake his head. "Harry's fine, Dudley. He's just unconscious." Remus then lifted an insensible Harry up off the floor before looking a little despairingly at Lily. "Not quite how I saw this going."

Lily groaned. "I know. You'd better wake him up."

Harry opened his eyes. "Why aren't I dead?"

Dae prevented Remus from answering Harry's question, and rounded on his friend. "You used me, Remus."

"No, Dae, I didn't." Remus could see the disgust his friend felt at what he'd done. "Harry had to be totally convinced and capable of casting the killing curse before he took the Mark. What if Amicus or the Dark Lord asks him to kill someone in future?"

Harry's head shot up. "I'm going to have to kill someone else?"

Dae begrudgingly admitted that Remus had a point. "You might, Harry. As a member of the Order, you're not only supposed to protect the Dark Lord, but to uphold his law which occasionally includes making an example of someone."

"But I still didn't think..." Harry's voice trailed off.

Lily put a hand on Harry's arm which he shook off. "Harry, I thought you'd be pleased to find out that we'd spared you from having to kill someone."

Harry's face turned red as he grew angry. "Big deal. Dae has just told me I might have to do it again anyway. Why bother in the first place?"

"Because you might never have to, and I didn't want your hands stained with the blood of an innocent victim." Remus defended their actions.

"But you still let me believe that that was exactly what I had done." Harry screamed at his Dad.

Remus tried to make Harry listen to reason. "If Amicus or the Dark Lord had used Legilimency on you, they needed to be totally convinced that you believed you'd killed someone."

Harry wasn't placated. "You made me feel like shit as I faced that woman. Do you have any idea how I felt?"

"Yes, Harry, I do." Remus told him. "You seem to forget that I had to go through the same thing as you did."

"But you didn't have someone throwing the possibility of their family's deaths in your face, did you?" Harry shouted. "I can't believe you did that to me."

"Harry, please try and understand why I did it." Remus could see that his plea was falling on deaf ears as Harry ignored him and headed for the door.

"Go to hell." Harry angrily stalked out of the room and made for the garden. Once there, he found his favorite spot, a bench beside a small waterfall that cascaded into a large pond, and sat down.

Jamie came out and sat down next to him. "I thought I'd better come outside. Everyone's arguing about you."

"So what?" Harry snapped.

Jamie wasn't put off by his brother's attitude. "Harry, I know you probably want to be alone right now but I need to tell you something."

"What is it?" Harry didn't look at his brother, and continued to watch the water as it splashed down the waterfall.

"If I could have used a fake wand, then I would have." Jamie put a hand on Harry's arm, and turned Harry to face him. "You're lucky, Harry. You should have killed someone but you didn't. I know you're angry at Mum and Uncle Remus but they only did what they thought was best."

"So making me believe I'd killed someone was for the best?" Harry snarled. "When I said I couldn't kill the woman, Dad had the gall to stand there, and taunt me with the fact that he would have to kill my sisters and Dudley if I didn't, when he knew that it wasn't real."

Jamie decided that shouting at Harry probably wasn't the way to go, and initially kept calm. "I know that, but it was real for you. Harry, it

had to be. As Uncle Remus said, you had to truly believe that you'd killed that woman. Uncle Remus just told Dae that he'd never been more frightened than when you refused."

"He was just scared he'd slip down the ranks if his son didn't come up to par." Harry bit out.

"You're being unfair to Uncle Remus, Harry." Jamie could feel his own temper starting to rise at Harry's refusal to accept the truth.

"Unfair?" Harry got to his feet. "It's unfair that I went through hell yesterday and today, and they knew when they were putting me through it that I wasn't really going to kill anyone."

Jamie also got to his feet and prodded in Harry in the chest. "Do you have any idea what I'd give to be able to say that I hadn't taken a life? I had to stand by and watch as someone died because of the trap I'd laid out for them. I'd have given anything, I mean anything, for someone to turn round and tell me I hadn't really done it. You're a selfish bastard, Harry. Yes, you went through hell, but so have Mum, Uncle Remus and Dae. You know how bloody hard it was for them yesterday, and yet you are still treating them like they've committed a crime."

Jamie went to storm off, only for Harry to grab his arm. "I'm sorry."

Jamie shook his head. "It's not me you should be apologizing to Harry."

Harry gave a small smile. "I'm being a git, aren't I?"

Jamie acknowledged Harry's admission. "Yes, Harry, you are." Jamie then nudged him gently. "Do you want to come back in?"

Harry nodded. "I think I do." He stood up. "You do know that it's usually Luna who gives me this kind of lecture."

"She wanted to come out and talk to you but I refused to let her as there was something else I wanted to say." Jamie looked down at the ground before looking up again. "Harry, I'm not really much better

than you are. Up until all this happened, I've resented you so much. I'm sorry that it's taken something like this for me to finally get over myself."

"I'm sorry as well. I haven't been much nicer." Harry hugged Jamie. "Come on, I'd better go in and apologize to the others."

The two brothers headed back into the house together.

Present Time

Remus had watched as Severus had listened in silence as he recounted what Harry had gone through. "So what do you think?"

Severus raised an eyebrow. "I'm still getting over the shock of finding out that Potter's a Death Eater. Did you sponsor his first kill?"

Remus shook his head. "The Dark Lord left Amicus to give him instructions."

Suddenly Severus' face became awash with understanding. "He killed the Gryffindor girl didn't he?"

Remus hesitated but knew that Severus wouldn't give Jamie away. "I'd best tell you what happened to him."

After Remus finished giving his second explanation of the day, Severus agreed to keep quiet. "I don't like him but I do feel sorry for him." Severus shook his head. "This is a complete mess, isn't it?"

Remus gave a bitter laugh. "That's an understatement. I'm at my wits' end of how to deal with Harry. He apologized to everyone about blowing his top but ever since then he's been withdrawn and barely speaks to anyone. The only people he seems to want anything to do with are Dae and Jamie."

"Do you have any idea what went on when he took the Mark?" Severus asked.

“Unfortunately not, but I’ve got a feeling Dae does.” Remus got up. “It’s almost five o’clock. I’m supposed to be meeting up with Dae and Anna. I’m going to grill Dae to try and figure out what happened between the two of them.”

“I know you want to talk to Dae but I think you should give Harry a little more time before harrassing the one person he's actually speaking to who might know what went on. Why don't you floo Dae, and tell him you can't make it?” Severus pointed to his fireplace. “I only use it in emergencies, but I consider today exactly that.”

Remus made the call, apologizing to his friends, who waved off his apologies, before getting up to face Severus. “I’m getting old; it seems to be more and more uncomfortable every time I get down to make a floo call.”

Severus shook his head in disbelief. “Of course it is. Come on, you can join me for dinner.”

Three Days Later

Remus walked into the dining room to find his son sitting alone. “Harry, I didn’t expect to see you here.”

“I was hungry.” Harry then returned his attention back to his breakfast.

“Where’s Jamie?” Remus asked as he sat down.

“Bedroom.” Harry responded in a monosyllabic tone.

Remus could tell that breakfast was going to be a tedious affair if he had to drag any sort of conversation out of Harry. He’d just sat down when the fireplace in the hallway flared to life. Lily’s voice carried into the room. “Is anyone here?”

Remus got up. “We’re in the dining room.”

Lily hurried in smiling brightly at Harry, who simply looked questioningly at her. “Good morning, big brother.”

Harry's face lit up for the first time in days. "Mum's had the baby?"

Lily nodded. "Kai Brendan Remus Lovegood was born just after six o'clock this morning, and he weighed in at a whopping eleven pounds."

Remus' mouth fell open. "They used my name?"

"Grim insisted." Lily told him. "He said that despite your erm, colored past, you'd been nothing but wonderful to him and Nia since they got together."

"I'd never have imagined they'd ever do this." Remus coughed to hide his emotions. "When can we visit?"

"Grim said you can come any time after five tonight. I think Nia needs a little time to get over the birth. It was rather long." Lily yawned and sat down. "I'm absolutely starving."

Remus grinned as he watched Lily help herself to a very large plate of food.

Feeling more relaxed than he'd done since taking the Dark Mark, Harry decided to try and be a little nicer to Lily. "Would you like a cup of tea?"

Lily nodded. "I would."

As Harry picked up the milk jug, a crack sounded in the hallway, and Sirius' voice could be heard. "Is that bacon I smell?"

The milk jug slipped lifelessly from Harry's fingers. "Sorry. The jug was wet."

"Morning." Sirius looked down at the milk that was running onto the floor. "I see someone knocked over the milk jug."

Remus smiled at his friend. "I did. I was a little excited at hearing about Nia's newborn."

Lily hid her surprise at Remus' lie and smiled brightly at her husband. "Are you on your way to work?"

Sirius nodded. "I floored the hospital. Alice told me that Harry's mother had had the baby and that you'd come here to tell Harry. I also dropped by Narcy's. She said that she'll keep the kids until tomorrow, so don't rush over there to get them." He smiled at Remus. "The same goes for your two. I know you were supposed to be collecting them today but Narcy said that another day or so won't make any difference to her."

Remus smiled back. "That's great. I'll pick them up tomorrow and take them to see their new brother then. I'm sure Nia could do without being bombarded by all of them at once."

Sirius slipped into the seat next to Harry. "Would you like to come to the hospital with me now? Get in and see your new brother before the others do?"

Remus answered for him. "He can't. I'd like to get something nice for Nia and the new baby, and as Harry is going to be visiting them with me, I want him to pick something out for them as well."

Sirius looked at his wife. "Don't tell me, you're going along as well."

Lily laughed lightly. "Of course. You know me and shopping."

Sirius ruffled Harry's hair before getting up and kissing his wife. "I'll see you all later." He then walked into the hallway before apparating out.

Harry called for Pasha, who appeared without delay. "Maman needs some milk."

After Pasha returned and left the milk, Lily turned to Remus. "Why did you lie to Sirius about spilling the milk?"

"Harry knows why; don't you, Harry?" Remus' jovial look had slipped off his face.

"I have no idea what you mean." Harry could hear his voice shaking.

Remus shook his head. "Harry, I think you sometimes forget that I'm a werewolf with an excellent sense of smell."

Harry refused to look at Remus. Lily looked from one of them to the other. "What do you mean about your sense of smell?"

Remus laid a hand on Harry's arm. "I could your smell your fear, Harry."

Harry pulled away and got up. "I really don't see where you're going with this. Please excuse me."

Lily waited until Harry had left the room to say anything. "You don't mean what I think you mean, do you?"

Remus was looking angrier than Lily had ever seen him before. "What do you think I mean, Lily?"

Lily shook her head. "He can't be." She got up. "I won't listen to this."

Remus didn't attempt to stop her as she fled into the hallway.

Jamie was just coming down the stairs. "Mum, what's wrong?"

"Where's Harry?" Lily's tone bordered on frantic.

"He mumbled something about the dueling room." Jamie frowned. "What's going on?"

"Nothing." With that Lily headed upstairs.

Remus came out from the dining room. "Where's Lily, Jamie?"

"She went upstairs after Harry." Jamie crossed his arms. "Will someone please tell me what's going on?"

"Later." Remus followed in the others' footsteps, catching up with Lily just before she reached the dueling room.

"Don't you dare say anything." Lily snapped as she pushed open the door and marched in to face her son. "Tell me it's not true, Harry."

"That what's not true, Maman?" Harry's face had once more reverted back to its calm and collected mask.

"That Sirius isn't Amicus." Lily's voice was pleading.

"Maman, do you really think that Sirius could be like that?" Harry countered.

Lily relaxed and turned on Remus. "I told you that it couldn't be true. There's no way Sirius would do this to Harry."

By now Jamie had reached the dueling room. "Do what to Harry?"

Lily sighed. "Harry dropped a milk jug at breakfast, which coincided with your Dad apparating in. Remus sensed Harry was frightened and immediately jumped to the wrong conclusion; that Sirius is Amicus."

Jamie laughed. "Dad doesn't hurt people, he's a healer." Jamie smiled at his brother. "That's ridiculous, isn't it Harry?"

Harry smiled back at his brother. "Yes, Jamie it is. Now can we please change the subject?"

Remus shook his head. "No, Harry, we can't." He then turned to Lily. "You probably won't know this, but ever since Harry has been a small child, whenever he tells a lie he plays with his hair."

Harry promptly snatched his hand away from his hair.

Frightened, Lily began to get angry. "I'm getting fed up of this. Is it or isn't it true? Tell me, Harry."

"He can't Lily." Remus reminded her. "If he does know who Amicus is, Harry will be under oath to keep his identity secret."

Dae chose that moment to appear. "I don't know, Remus. First of all you blow me off the other night, and then no-one's around to meet me when I floo in today. Some friend you..." It was then that Dae noticed the angry look on Lily's face. "Err, what's going on?"

Lily marched angrily up to him, before throwing up a privacy bubble. "Why didn't you tell me Sirius was Amicus, Dae?"

"How did you find out?" Dae watched as Lily started to pitch towards the ground at his words, the privacy bubble dispelling.

Dae grabbed her before she could hit the floor. "Damn".

"Let's take her to my room." Remus held open the door for Dae to carry Lily out. "We can enervate her there."

Once in Remus' room, Dae laid Lily on the bed, and enervated her. Remus called for Pasha. "Please fetch me a calming potion." When the elf returned, Remus sat on the edge of the bed beside Lily. "Drink this."

Lily shook her head. "I don't want it."

"I think you should." Dae said quietly. "You're going to need to stay calm."

Doing as Dae urged, Lily knocked back vial of potion. "I wanted Harry to tell me it wasn't true, that Sirius couldn't be Amicus, and then you came in and confirmed my worst fears. And all this time I thought he was having an affair when he didn't come home, and when he lied about where he'd been." Lily let out a harsh sob; the calming potion preventing her from dissolving into fully blown tears. "I hate him. I really hate him."

Jamie recoiled at his Mum's vehemence. "Mum! They're wrong; they've got to be. Dad would never do that."

Lily knew that Jamie worshipped Sirius. "I'm sorry, Jamie, but they're not."

Dae scowled at Lily. "You could have killed me, you know."

"I'm sorry." Lily looked a little guilty at what she'd done. "But I had to know."

"Dae, why aren't you dead?" Harry's quavery voice interrupted.

"Because I was totally convinced that Lily knew." Dae explained. "If I hadn't been when I answered her question, the oath would have killed me. As the truth is now out, I can talk freely, as you can, to anyone in this room. What I don't understand is how anyone figured out Amicus' identity."

Remus looked over at Dae. "Harry dropped a milk jug this morning."

"And?" Dae couldn't see the connection.

"Sirius had just apparated in." Remus explained. "I could smell Harry's fear, Dae."

Dae rested a hand on Harry's shoulder, feeling tremors running through him. "It'll be okay, Harry." Harry just turned and buried his face into Dae's chest.

Jamie didn't want to accept what he was being told. "Tell him it's not true, Harry. You said it wasn't."

Lily tamped down on her distress to comfort her son. "Jamie, it's true. I wish it wasn't but it is."

Jamie sat down heavily. "How could Dad do that?"

Harry lifted his head from Dae's chest and looked up at him. "This is my entire fault."

Dae instantly denied Harry's self-accusation. "No, it's not."

"If I hadn't been so hell bent on wanting to know who he was, then none of this would have happened." Harry argued.

Lily shook her head. "Harry, if Sirius hadn't become a Death Eater and deceived everyone, then none of this would have happened. It has absolutely nothing to do with you."

Harry couldn't stop shaking. "But..."

Dae took charge. "I think we all need to sit down and talk calmly."

Jamie suddenly bolted towards the door. "No. You can't be right. Dad wouldn't do that. I'm going to get him. He'll tell you all it's not true."

Remus stood in front of the door. "I can't let you do that, Jamie."

Jamie went to apparate away, only for nothing to happen. "Why can't I apparate out?"

"This is my room, Jamie. Only Harry and I can apparate in or out. I'm sorry." Remus then petrified his nephew.

Remus summoned extra chairs. "Let's get this over with. We're going to have to go to the hospital at some point."

Lily beckoned to Harry. "Harry, come sit down here, please."

Harry shook his head. "I've just destroyed your life. How could you want me anywhere near you?"

Lily got up and pulled Harry down next to her. "You have not destroyed my life. Sirius did that when he chose to serve Voldemort. Now I know that Sirius is Amicus, I want to know is exactly what happened when you received the Mark."

Harry leant closer to Lily. "Before I do, can't we make Jamie a little more comfortable?"

Remus started guiltily. He'd almost forgotten about Jamie. He released Jamie's mouth from the spell. "If you give me your word that you'll listen and not try to leave this room until I tell you you can, then I'll release you."

Jamie begrudgingly gave his promise. "I swear that I'll listen and not attempt to leave unless you say I can."

Remus released him and Jamie moved to sit on the other side of his mother, who immediately put her arm around him. Remus waited for Dae to sit down before taking the remaining chair. "I'd say we're all pretty much comfortable now, Harry."

Harry began.

19th July 1995

Amicus sat down on Voldemort's throne. "So is there anything else you want to know before I show you who I am?"

Harry thought for a moment, before shaking his head. "No."

"Don't say I didn't warn you." Amicus then pulled off his mask.

Harry went white and backed away. "Oh Merlin, no."

"I thought you'd react like this." Sirius nodded at the glass that he'd refilled. "Drink that. It will help with the shock."

Shaking badly, Harry did as he was told. He then looked accusingly at Sirius. "You bastard. Do you have any idea what you've just put me through?" Not thinking, Harry drew his wand, doubling up in pain as he did so.

Sirius wagged his finger. "I wouldn't do that if I was you, Harry. You've just sworn never to attack me unless invited to do so, and I don't recall inviting you to do so." Sirius leant forward. "So I suggest you put that away. I'm going to let the name calling go this time but believe me when I say that I won't be giving you the same leeway ever again."

Suddenly the precariousness of his position filtered through to Harry, and he put his wand away, the pain slowly dying away as he did so. "How could you do this? I thought you liked me."

"I do like you Harry, which is why I chose you." Sirius got up. "Put on your mask and follow me."

Not daring to disobey, Harry did as he was told. Sirius replaced his own mask and led the way out of a side door and up a set of stairs. Harry soon found himself on the same landing he'd left from the first time he'd been in Villa Laurifer. He was a little surprised when Sirius walked by his own door and led Harry further down the corridor, before stopping in front of a set of ornate double doors. Sirius pushed them open. "This is for you."

Harry's mouth fell open behind his mask as he walked into the room. Sirius followed behind him. "You can take off your mask again, if you want to."

Hating the mask, Harry didn't need telling twice. "Why all this?"

"You're my protégé. This room simply reflects your status." Sirius walked up to the drinks cabinet. "Another?"

Already feeling a little lightheaded, Harry refused. "No thank you."

Sirius indicated that Harry should sit down on one of the large oversized chocolate colored sofas. "I hope you like it."

"It's hard not to." Harry admitted. "But why pick me. Why not pick Jamie?"

Sirius realized that Harry must have found out about Jamie. "You obviously know what Jamie is then." At Harry's nod, Sirius continued. "I didn't pick Jamie because he's not you. While he's magically proficient, he's not even close to being in your league, Harry."

"But he's the Boy Who Lived." Harry pointed out.

"Which is exactly why my Master chose him to become part of the Order." Sirius smirked. "How did you find out about him?"

"I surprised him and Dad when they returned home after a meeting." Harry didn't want to say that Jamie had slipped up by revealing his mask, as he didn't want his brother to be punished.

"So Remus has taken Jamie under his wing, has he?" Sirius looked pleased. "Good. Despite his little hiccup the other year, Remus is well on his way to achieving a status similar to my own."

"Hiccup?" Harry couldn't believe how blasé Sirius was about how he'd attacked his Dad. "You nearly killed him."

"But I didn't." Sirius scowled. "Let me make something very clear to you Harry. When we are in a social setting, Remus and I are good friends. When it comes down to interfering with my duties to my Master, he is my subordinate, and I have every right to punish him as I see fit."

Harry asked about himself. "So how am I supposed to act around you?"

"At home, you'll treat me as you've always done." Sirius informed him. "Here, I am your superior, and you will show me the respect I deserve."

Harry could see that Sirius was being deadly serious. "What happens if I don't?"

"I take it you've experienced the Cruciatus?" Sirius asked quietly.

"Yes." Harry had a feeling that Sirius wouldn't be underpowering the curse if he used it on him.

"So we understand each other." Sirius' face took on a kindly look again. "Harry, I don't want for us to be at odds with each other. I really do care about you. If Dumbledore hadn't interfered, then you would have been my son."

Harry was curious. "Would you still have wanted me for your protégé if I had been?"

“Undoubtedly.” Sirius knew that Harry wasn’t happy about being forced into the position. He was also confident that he’d change his mind about how he felt. “But if I hadn’t picked you, then Orion would have been next in line.”

Harry felt relieved that he'd been more suitable. “Rather me than Orion.”

Sirius knew Harry hated the idea of his siblings becoming Death Eaters. “Just because he isn’t going to be my protégé and successor, doesn’t mean that Orion won’t eventually take his place with my Master.”

Harry suddenly felt very anxious for his siblings. “What about Anna and Cassie?”

“Anna will undoubtedly make an excellent Death Eater. She’s already well on her way to moving in the right circles.” Sirius knew that Anna would do whatever Jamie told her to. “Cassie, on the other hand, wouldn’t. She’s too soft-hearted.”

Harry was relieved to hear that. “So you won’t make her join?”

Sirius shook his head. “But I will be arranging a suitable marriage for her.”

“And Maman; does she know who you are?” Harry was almost a hundred percent sure that she didn’t.

“No, Harry, she doesn’t.” Sirius shrugged. “I might tell her eventually, but I doubt it. She’s already vowed to kill me for what I’ve supposedly put you through.”

Harry felt warm inside at Lily’s defense of him. “You won’t hurt her, will you?”

“I love Lily; I’d never do anything to seriously hurt her.” Sirius was being truthful.

“But you threw a curse at her at the World Cup.” Harry pointed out.

"It wouldn't have done any major damage; it was merely a low level pain curse." Sirius responded. "Harry, please trust me when I say that I'd do almost anything for Lily."

Harry wasn't entirely sure he believed Sirius. "So what happens now?"

"I have a task for you." Sirius stood up.

Harry felt his heart begin to race. "What is it?"

"I have a curse I wish for you master before you return tomorrow night." Sirius passed Harry a book. "Each time you return, I expect for you to have learned one curse out of this book."

Harry had to fight not to vomit as he looked inside the book. The first curse was a disembowelment curse, and the wizzarding picture in the book didn't spare any detail. "Will I have to perform it when I return?"

Sirius nodded. "Of course."

Harry put the book under his cloak. "What time tomorrow?"

"Ten o'clock. Remus can accompany you if he so wishes." Sirius picked up the mask he'd taken off when he entered the room. "You can apparate from here if you want to."

Harry frowned. "But I thought that..."

"Special privilege. You're one of the elite now, Harry." Sirius hoped that Harry would eventually understand what an honor he'd bestowed on him. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Harry apparated out.

Present Time

Jamie was crying silently, Lily rocking him as he did so. "Why, Mum?"

Lily stroked his hair. "I don't know, sweetie. But I do know one thing. Over my dead body will any more of my children become his pawns."

"I shouldn't worry too much just yet about that." Dae didn't want Lily doing anything silly. "They're all still far too young."

Remus sighed. "Merlin, how did we get into the mess?"

Harry shrugged, and leant around his mother to look at Jamie who was still crying. "I'm sorry, Jamie."

Jamie struggled to pull himself together. "I can't go home again. I can't face him."

Lily shuddered. "I'm not sure I can, either."

"You've got to." Dae told them. "Sirius can't suspect that either of you know. Believe me, if he's pushed he might attack you, and there's no way you two can defend yourself. None of us are in a position to do it either."

Lily looked up at Remus. "Tell him that I'm exhausted from sitting up all last night with Nia, and that I decided to stay here, and that Jamie has offered to stay with me."

Remus thought Lily's idea was a good one. "You can both take this room." He checked the time. "I need to be going. Harry and I need to pick up something for Nia and get to the hospital, to say nothing of letting Georgie know about her new brother."

"What about Dudley?" Dae was surprised that Harry's brother wasn't around.

"He and Luna went out early to see a muggle movie." Remus looked apologetically at Harry. "I think that they were finding Harry a little irritating and just wanted to get away from him."

Harry looked ashamed. "I'm sorry. I've just found it difficult to cope the last few days."

"We understand." Lily certainly did now after she'd found out the truth. "Right now I just want to take a sleeping potion and forget all of this happened."

Remus turned to Dae. "Can you stay with them until I get back?"

Dae nodded. "Of course. I'll just floo Anna and let her know I'm staying here."

Remus held out his hand to Harry. "We've got things to do."

Harry grabbed his Dad's hand and before he knew it, they'd apparated to the outskirts of London. "Where are we going?"

"Selfridges. They've got a foodhall on the ground floor where I can get some chocolates and some scotch." Remus began to tell Harry as they walked towards the department floor. "I think they've also got a kids department where we can get some outfits for the new baby. I don't want to turn up at the hospital with nothing after telling Sirius we were going shopping."

"I'm sorry I couldn't tell you about him." Harry almost had to run to keep up with his Dad as they turned onto Oxford Street.

Remus slowed down as they neared the store. He checked the hours and relaxed. "They're open until midday, so we're alright for time."

Harry followed his Dad into the store before Remus led him to the first floor and into the café. "We can spare half hour or so before I need to get you to the hospital." After buying them both something to drink, Remus steered his son over to an empty table away from everyone else. "Harry, I don't blame you. I actually don't know how you've managed not being able to tell anyone."

"I had Dae." Harry reminded his Dad.

"Why did you push me and Lily away?" Remus asked as he stirred his coffee. "Even though I know you couldn't tell us, we would have still supported you."

"I was so ashamed that I hadn't seen through Sirius." Harry admitted. "I felt like such a fool. I really thought he cared about me but I think all he cared about was getting himself an apprentice."

Remus shook his head. "I think he's telling the truth when he says that he really does like you."

Harry looked incredulous. "He's put me through so much crap. How can you say that?"

"Sirius won't have seen it as putting you through crap. He'll have seen it as a test." Remus took a mouthful of coffee.

Harry giggled. "You've got a milk moustache from the foam, Dad."

Remus left it there, glad to see Harry smiling again. "Harry, there's another reason why I think Sirius is telling the truth."

Harry was extremely interested in what Remus had to say. "What is it?"

Remus knew his words would surprise Harry. "I know the rooms you've been given. They were supposed to be kept for Voldemort's heir. Amicus, I mean Sirius, must think a great deal of you if he's appropriated the rooms for you."

Harry was shocked. "He said it was an honor. I didn't really believe him." Harry dipped his spoon into his cream encrusted hot chocolate. "Dad, can you apparate directly into your rooms?"

Remus shook his head. "Which only goes to show that, twisted as he is, Sirius really does care about you. You won't have to be subject to the displays that sometimes take place in the ballroom."

Harry decided not to ask about the displays. "I'm worried about Maman. I know Sirius said he loves her and everything but what would happen if it came down to choosing Maman or Voldemort?"

Remus finished his coffee before answering honestly. "In that case I think Lily might be in trouble." Remus got up. "And Harry, try to stick

to calling him the Dark Lord if you can. If you slip up when we're at Villa Laurifer, I won't be able to step in to help you, and I really don't want to have to punish you for it."

Harry recognized the sense behind his Dad's request. "I won't." Harry hesitated before leaving. "Dad, I'm sorry for the way I've been but retreating has been the only way for me to cope."

"What about Hermione?" Remus asked as they made their way back down to the ground floor. "Are you going to reconcile with her now?"

Harry shook his head. "No." When he saw Remus was about to say something else, he held up his hand. "Please Dad. Just respect my decision."

Not wanting to alienate Harry again, Remus agreed to Harry's request. "Come on, we've got things to buy."

St. Mungo's

Harry wasn't entirely surprised to be met by Sirius coming along the corridor as they made their way to Nia's room. "Hi. I see you got your purchases." He looked round them. "Where's Lily and Jamie?"

Harry answered. "Dudley and Luna don't know we're here. Maman said that she was tired anyway and would stay with Jamie to wait for them to get back home. I think she was going to take a sleeping potion after they get back."

"Is she staying the night?" Sirius asked as he accompanied them down the corridor.

"Probably." Remus told him. "She looked completely wiped."

Sirius didn't appear bothered. "That's alright. We're completely bogged down here today, and I'm not sure whether I'll get back until the early hours anyway."

Before they reached Nia's room, Sirius stopped. "Would you mind if I borrowed Harry for a minute? I've got something I want to show him."

Remus felt his heart jump but acted casually. "Go ahead. Send him along when you've finished."

Sirius led Harry off towards his office before closing the door behind them. "Sit down."

Harry did as he was told. Sirius flopped into his chair before turning to face Harry. "I just wanted to let you know that because I'm stuck here today, I won't expect to see you tonight."

Harry was relieved. "Thanks for telling me. Can I go now?"

Sirius shook his head. "I said I had something for you."

Nervously, Harry watched as Sirius got up and opened a cupboard to reveal a petrified dog. "You got me a dog?" Harry was puzzled.

"It's not a pet. It's for practice." Sirius stood to one side. "I want to see that you've mastered the Anima curse before you return to Remus."

Harry refused. "I can't."

Sirius backhanded him. "I've told you last night that there's no such word as "can't" in our vocabulary, now didn't I, Harry?"

Harry resisted the instinct to wipe the blood away that was now trickling down his chin. "Yes, Sir." Harry stood up and backed away slightly. "I'm not able to do the spell because it would send my eyes black, and I can't go and see Mum looking like that."

Sirius now understood Harry's reluctance. "If that's the case, then you've obviously been practicing." He pulled out his wand making Harry flinch. "I'm not going to hurt you. I need to heal your face."

Harry forced himself to keep still as Sirius healed his face. "May I go now?"

Sirius nodded. "Tell Lily and Jamie I'll see them back home tomorrow."

Harry decided to help his brother out. "Is there any chance Jamie could stay a little longer? He's a good dueling partner, and I need his help now that I've told Hermione she can no longer help me."

Sirius' face lit up. "I'm glad you saw the light. Jamie can stay for as long as he wants to. Is there any change of heart on getting together with Pansy Parkinson?"

Harry scowled. "There's no way I'm tying myself down to that girl."

Sirius laughed. "You never remain cowed for very long, do you, Harry?" Sirius mulled over what he'd asked Harry to do. "Fair enough. But just remember that you're my apprentice, and as such, I expect you to make a politically suitable alliance with someone I approve of. A girl like Snivellus' daughter would be anything but."

Harry was glad that Sirius had thought that Hermione had been nothing more than a dueling partner. He hated to think what Sirius might have done to Hermione if he had known otherwise. "I understand."

Sirius slid off the edge of his desk. "You can go."

Glad to escape, Harry rushed out without looking back. Closing the door, Sirius sat back down in his chair and mulled Harry over. He knew that his wife's son didn't like being his protege but he also knew that eventually Harry would become more and more enamored of the power he would hold. Sirius picked up a handful of floo powder. He wanted to speak to his Master about arranging a little test for his apprentice. The office was left empty as Sirius disappeared in a flash of green flames.

I hope everyone had a great Thanksgiving!

Chapter 53: Dark Magic

26th July 1995

Lily awoke in the dark and wondered where she was for a moment until the day's previous events flooded back. Looking across the room she started as the outline of man was silhouetted against the bright firelight.

"Lily, are you alright?" Remus got up from his seat where he had been watching over Lily.

"I'm fine, Remus." Lily laughed a little self-deprecatingly. "Actually I'm not fine, but I will be."

"Do you want something warm to drink or something to eat?" Pasha had told Remus that Lily had refused anything to eat.

"I'd like a sandwich, but I can make it." Lily swung her legs out of the bed and stretched. "I'll just get dressed."

When she came out of the bathroom, the bedroom was fully lit and a plate of sandwiches and a jug of creamy hot chocolate were laid out on the table that normally graced the sitting area. "I said I would have done it; there was no need to get Pasha up."

"I didn't." Remus had had no intention of disturbing his favorite house-elf. "It's only four a.m., Lily. I made this myself."

Hungry, Lily didn't bother to say anything else, and tucked into the sandwiches. After ten minutes, she finally stopped eating. "They were great."

Remus smiled. "You can thank Nia's lessons for that. She despaired of the cheese sandwiches I was always making."

Lily smiled at the thought of her sister. "What did you think of little Kai?"

“That he's not so little.” Remus decided not to mention Harry's run-in with Sirius. “I'm taking Georgie, Luna and Dudley to see him this morning, and Auri, Cassie and Scarlett in the afternoon.”

“I'm sure Orion and Anna will want to see him when they return from Narcy's.” Lily knew that Orion at least would want to but preferred to give her fickle daughter the benefit of the doubt.

“Jamie told me he doesn't want to go anywhere near the hospital.” Remus knew that Lily would probably already know that, but she had been sleeping when he and Harry had finally gotten home.

“I know.” Lily looked worried. “I don't know how well he's going to manage when we return home later today.”

Remus rushed to allay Lily's fears. “Harry asked Sirius if Jamie could stay as his dueling partner now that he's ditched Hermione, and Sirius agreed that Jamie could stay as long as he wants.”

Lily let out a sigh of relief. “I was really worried about him. Thanks.” Lily yawned. “I can't believe how tired I am still.”

“Go back to bed.” Remus ordered.

“But what about you?” Even though Lily was now fully clothed, she decided to lie down again on top of the bed.

“I've some reading I can do in the library.” Remus didn't want Lily to feel obliged to sit up with him.

“You can come and read in here if you want to.” Lily didn't want to admit it, but she felt safer when Remus was there.

Remus picked up his wand. “I'll be back in a little while then.” When he returned, Lily was fast asleep, so he settled down in front of the fireplace; ten minutes later the book he was reading slipped out of his hand, as he too, fell asleep.

1st August 1995

Lily smiled bright at Remus. "What brings you round here?"

"I need some female advice." Remus said loudly before silently mouthing his next sentence to Lily. "Is he in?"

Lily shook her head. "I'm all alone. What can I do for you?"

"How about coming for an afternoon of shopping? I need some help on how to decorate a guest bedroom." Even with Sirius gone, Remus was still wary about talking to Lily in the Black House.

"You know and me shopping. Let me just get my cloak and ask Orion to keep an eye on his sister." Lily went to leave.

"I'm going into Muggle London. You might want to rethink the cloak." Remus suggested.

After making sure that Orion would be alright alone with Cassie and the house-elves, Lily picked up her Muggle jacket instead and followed Remus out of the front door. "So what do you really..."

Remus held his finger to his lips, stopping Lily from continuing with her sentence as he didn't want to talk until they got clear of the house. Once they'd reached the outskirts of London, Remus drew Lily into a quiet pub. "This will do."

Lily followed Remus up to the bar as he ordered drinks for both of them. "Why don't you find us a table?"

Lily did as Remus asked, watching the clientele until Remus made his way over to her. "So come on, tell me what's so important that you couldn't discuss it at home."

Remus' face became sorrowful. "I've learnt Flitwick has died."

"Oh no. I'm really sorry to hear that." Lily felt nothing but sadness at the kindly professor's passing. "But what has that got to do with me?"

Remus lifted an eyebrow. "You are the best Charms expert Minerva knows after Flitwick. She'd like you to take over."

“What about Dumbledore?” Lily was surprised the headmaster hadn’t tried to veto such an offer.

“No-one knows where he is. He simply left Minerva in charge and told her to sort out the new hires.” Remus intended to set up a meeting of the Alliance to discuss Dumbledore before he returned to school. “So what do you think?”

“I don’t think Sirius would be too happy.” Lily told him. “I’ll speak to him about it though.”

“Minerva said that you can work Monday to Friday except for Hogsmeade weekends; bring Cassie with you and return home at weekends.” Remus then played his trump card. “It would also get you away from Sirius.”

Lily was finding it difficult to cope being in close proximity to her husband. “Well, Sirius’ main gripe was that I wasn’t there for the kids. If I take Cassie with me, he can hardly say I’m neglecting her. I’ll broach it with him tonight, if he’s in.”

Remus hoped that Sirius would agree. “Now that’s out of the way, let’s go shopping.”

Lily laughed. “You dump that on me, and then simply say, let’s go shopping.”

“Yep.” Remus pulled her to her feet. “I know just the place.”

The two friends disappeared out of the pub and up the street.

8th August 1995

Sirius floored home to find Lily sitting in the dark watching the fire flicker and dance. “Is everything alright?”

Lily stood up. “Fine. Did you have a good day?”

Sirius frowned at the coldness in Lily's voice. She'd been quite distant towards him for quite a while now. "Not bad."

"Good." Lily went to walk past him, only for Sirius to reach out and grab her arm. "Lily, please tell me what's wrong. You haven't been yourself later."

Lily let out a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I'm just so worried about Harry."

"Harry will be just fine, Lily." Sirius pulled Lily into a hug. "He's already said that Amicus isn't treating him that badly."

Lily hid her disgust as Sirius stroked her hair. "There's something else."

Sirius could tell that whatever it was, Lily was nervous about telling him. "Go on."

Lily knew it was now or never. "Minerva McGonagall's offered me the Charms position. Apparently Flitwick died."

Sirius pulled Lily down onto the sofa with him. "Would you like the job?"

Lily couldn't believe that Sirius was actually being receptive to the possibility. "I would. Minerva's willing to let me return home at weekends, unless it's a Hogsmeade weekend; I can take Cassie with me, and I'll be able to keep an eye on the other kids."

Sirius leant back against the sofa as he mulled the job offer over. He knew that the numbers of Death Eaters were growing at an exponential rate, and he would be needed at Villa Laurifer more and more. He also knew that if Lily wasn't around, he wouldn't continually have to make excuses to her, which he hated doing. "If you can take Cassie with you, then I think it's a great idea."

"Really?" Lily couldn't contain her delight. "I can't wait to tell Cassie."

Sirius was glad to see Lily looking really happy. He gently reached out and touched her cheek, feeling her tremble under his fingers. "Do you realize how beautiful you look right now?"

Lily smiled hesitantly. "Don't be daft." As Sirius moved closer to her, she felt panic begin to overwhelm her and tried to get up, only for Sirius to hook an arm around her waist and pull her down onto his lap. "Sirius! I've got dinner in the oven. I need to check it on before it burns. And what would the house-elves think if they saw us like this?"

"I don't give a damn what the house-elves think, and the dinner can go up in smoke for all I care." Sirius slid his hand into Lily's hair.

"Sirius, we can't. We're in the sitting room." Lily prayed he'd let her go.

Sirius scowled, but didn't remove his hand. "It's never bothered you before."

"That's usually been in the middle of the night. Anyone could come through the fireplace." Lily was fast running out of excuses.

Sirius grinned, thinking that Lily's reticence stemmed from being caught by company, and let Lily go. "Okay."

Lily felt relieved but it was short-lived as Sirius touched his family ring, and spoke a few words.

"No-one's coming in here now." Sirius turned back to Lily. "Better?"

Knowing that she'd ran out of time and excuses, Lily simply nodded. Sirius smiled, rolled off the sofa, and pulled Lily down onto the floor with him.

13th August 1995

"Come in." Sirius looked up to see Alice Longbottom poke her head around the door. "Yes?"

"Can I have a word?" Alice stepped fully into the room.

“Close the door.” Sirius put down his quill.

“It’s about tomorrow.” Alice sat down. “Craig’s put me on emergency room duty. Is there any chance you can get me out of it?”

Sirius smirked. “Now why would I want to do that?”

Alice scowled at him. “You know very well why.”

“What’s it worth?” Sirius teased.

“I’ll cover two of your emergency room duties.” Alice offered.

“Make it my three next week, and we have a deal.” Sirius wanted to spend some time with Lily before she left for Hogwarts.

“Done.” Alice relaxed before looking at Sirius. “Do you really think he’s capable of doing it?”

Sirius answered confidently. “He’s more than capable. It’s more a matter of will than of capability.”

Alice wasn’t so sure. “If he’s as belligerent as you say he is, how do you know he won’t refuse?”

“He knows what awaits him, if he does.” Sirius grinned.

Alice was intrigued. “What did you do to him?”

Two nights earlier

Harry groaned quietly as he got up from the floor and rose unsteadily to his feet.

Sirius threw him a towel. “Wipe your face. You did well.”

Harry wiped his face, trying to ignore the blood that stained the towel. “Is that everything for today?”

Sirius nodded. “You can go.”

Harry threw down the towel and picked up his mask. "Good."

Sirius scowled at Harry's antagonism. "I know you didn't want this position, but you're in it now for better or worse, so I suggest you mind your manners."

"If you knew I didn't want to do this, why did you pick me?" Harry tried to keep the contempt he felt for Sirius out of his voice. "There's always a chance that I'll try and free myself from you somehow."

Sirius laughed. "Not with your family as hostage you won't." Sirius walked to his cupboard and pulled out a pensieve. "I'd like to show you what could happen to them should you ever decide to betray me."

Harry watched as Sirius pulled out his wand and removed a memory. "Go ahead."

Harry entered alone and watched the memory unfold.

After the memory finished, Harry emerged to find Sirius waiting for him. "How can you live with yourself?"

"Quite easily, Harry." Sirius wasn't bothered by Harry's reaction. "I like what I see in the mirror every day. Can you say the same?"

Harry looked disgusted. "I could until you did this to me."

Sirius merely grinned. "I'll see you tomorrow, Harry."

Present time

Alice laughed. "He's really not afraid of you is he?"

"He is but he certainly does his best to hide it." Sirius sighed. "I wish he'd just give in and accept the situation."

Alice smiled lazily. "That's why you set the test up, isn't it?"

Sirius nodded. "Harry's fighting against the pull of the magic but after tomorrow night, I think it will all be over."

Alice stood up. "I'm looking forward to it."

Sirius barked out a laugh. "I know you are, Mia, I know you are."

Alice pulled open the door. "See you tomorrow night."

Sirius nodded and went back to his paperwork.

The Next Night

Sirius watched as Remus took his place on the stage. As the last few stragglers made their way into the ballroom, Voldemort stood and the doors closed firmly on both sides of the room. He then turned to Sirius and nodded.

Sirius left the dais and went into the room behind it. "Come with me."

Harry and Jamie followed Sirius onto the dais and a murmur went through the crowd.

Voldemort turned to the crowd. "As my most loyal subject and friend..." At the word 'friend' gasps could be heard from several Death Eaters. "...Amicus has earned the right to choose an apprentice."

Sirius smirked as several Death Eaters' heads shot up. He knew that they were in for a shock when they found out that he had already picked his protégé.

Voldemort nodded towards Harry. "That is Alumno, Amicus' apprentice. You will obey him as you would Amicus." He then drew Jamie forward. "As you know Angelus is no longer with us. Carus here will be taking his place."

Remus managed to stifle his gasp at the name Voldemort had bestowed upon Jamie.

At the back of the room, a Death Eater nudged the man standing next to him. "Hardly intimidating are they?"

The man sniggered. "My wife would frighten me more."

Remus' sharp hearing picked up the disparaging conversation, and he went to move forward, only for Voldemort to hold up his hand. "I will deal with them, Praeses."

Remus stepped back, aware that the Dark Lord must have anticipated something like this happening.

The two men rose into the air and began to float toward the dais. The crowd fell silent and moved in to surround the men. Remus could smell the nerves and excitement of the crowd as they sensed some sort of example was about to be made. The two men came to gently rest on the floor in front of the dais where they both immediately bowed low. "My Lord."

"I'd like you to repeat your conversation for everyone's benefit, if you wouldn't mind." Voldemort asked nicely; too nicely.

Neither man said anything. Voldemort sighed. "If you wish to live longer than a few more seconds, then I suggest you tell everyone what was said."

Both men hurried to repeat their conversation. Voldemort held out his hand. "Take off your masks."

The two men reluctantly obeyed. Harry didn't recognize either of them.

Voldemort gestured to Harry, who moved to stand at Voldemort's side, inclining his head as he did so. "My Lord?"

"Alumno, do you think this man should be punished for what he said about you?" Voldemort asked as he pointed to the man who'd initiated the disparaging conversation.

Harry didn't hesitate. "I do, my Lord."

"Then please, show him exactly how intimidating you can be."
Voldemort stepped back.

Taking a deep breath, Harry turned his wand on the Death Eater.
"Crucio."

The Death Eater buckled under the power that Harry forced through his wand. Eventually Harry let up on the spell. The Death Eater, white and shaking, crawled to his knees. "Please forgive me."

Voldemort smiled evilly. "Do you think you should forgive him, Alumno?"

Remus could tell that Harry wasn't sure what to say and he gave a brief, almost imperceptible nod to Harry, hoping that his son would spot it.

Harry had. "No, my Lord, I don't."

Sirius, who had been watching Remus, grinned to himself. Remus knew exactly what would happen if Harry said yes. Any doubts about Remus' loyalty now disappeared.

The Death Eater began to babble in fear and back away, the crowd behind him preventing him from going too far.

Voldemort turned to Harry. "Finish him."

Sirius watched as Harry faced the Death Eater. Sirius smiled triumphantly when Harry's voice rang out clearly. "Avada Kedavra."

Remus closed his eyes as green light filled his vision for a moment. When he opened them, the Death Eater was dead.

Jamie was shaking. He knew that he would probably have to do the same as Harry. He had one big problem though; he'd been unable to master the killing curse. Taking a deep breath, he stepped forward when Voldemort told him to. "The remaining one is all yours, Carus."

Thinking desperately, Jamie suddenly had an idea. Pointing his wand at the remaining offender, he used the one spell he seemed to have no problem with. "Imperio."

The Death Eater's face went blank. Voldemort looked intrigued. "Continue."

Jamie swallowed. "Kill yourself. I don't care how you do it; that's up to you."

Remus hoped that Jamie realized that while Voldemort would let him get away with using the Imperius curse this time as it obviously amused him, it was doubtful he'd be able to do it again. Remus grimaced. He knew that Jamie would have to get a grip and master the killing curse, and the sooner the better.

The Death Eater struggled hard against the power that Jamie was pushing through his wand. Feeling the Death Eater fighting back, Jamie simply overpowered him; thankful that he was more than adept with the spell. Jamie wished he hadn't been able to see the terror on the Death Eater's face as the man gave up the struggle, put his wand to his head and uttered "Reducto."

Jamie struggled not to vomit as Voldemort put a hand on his shoulder. "Is there anyone else here, who has reason to believe that I should not have picked these two candidates?" Even if there had been, no-one would have dared say so out loud.

At the numerous headshakes, Voldemort smiled, satisfied. "Good." Having proved his point, Voldemort nodded to two Death Eaters who were standing at the side of the dais. "Bring out the muggle prisoners."

Remus felt his heart jump, only to relax at Voldemort's next words. "My loyal subjects, enjoy yourselves."

Voldemort turned to the Order. "I don't think we need to stay any longer. You may go."

Remus followed Harry to the apparition point, guessing where his son would likely apparate away to.

Harry jumped as a crack sounded behind him. Swinging round, his wand already drawn, he let out a sigh of relief when he realized that it was just Remus. "You frightened me."

Remus apologized. "I'm sorry but I wanted to see if you were okay."

Harry shrugged. "I'm fine."

Remus' eyes narrowed. "You've just killed a man in cold blood, Harry, and you calmly tell me that you're fine."

Harry scowled behind his mask. "You said yourself you didn't care about killing Death Eaters."

"That was me." Remus pointed out. "And there's another major difference."

"Which is?" Harry's tone bordered on insolent.

"I didn't enjoy it, Harry." Remus waited for Harry to deny it.

Harry didn't. "So what if I did. I've never felt anything like that before. Not when I thought I'd killed the kittens or that woman. It was almost as if someone had, some had..." Harry couldn't think quite how to describe it.

Remus finished his sentence for him. "As if someone had offered you the world."

"Exactly." Harry knew that Remus' description was spot on. "I'm sorry Dad but I've got to go. Mum will be worried otherwise."

Remus needed to see something before he did. "Where does Nia think you are?"

Harry was cornered. "With you."

“In that case, I’m going to owl her and tell her you’re staying over for a few days.” Remus informed his son as he took hold of Harry’s arm.

Unable to free himself, Harry soon found himself at Grimmauld Square. Remus let him go. “Take off your mask.”

Harry shook his head. “Why?”

“Harry, just do it.” Remus took off his own mask and held his hand out for Harry’s.

Harry reluctantly removed it. Remus gasped. “I knew it.”

Harry was more than aware of what Remus had spotted. “My eyes will return to normal in a few minutes.”

Unlike when Hermione had seen Harry’s blackened irises from performing the Anima curse, now Harry’s entire eye was black. “You’re doing too much dark magic, Harry. You’ve got to slow down.”

Harry refused. “I can’t. Sirius will go mad if I can’t perform the spells he wants me to.”

Remus guessed that Harry either didn’t recognize the danger he was in, or if he did, was choosing to ignore it. “Harry, I’m not asking you to stop but to cut back. If you don’t, you’re going to become addicted.”

Harry pulled a face. “I’m not addicted, Dad.”

Remus nodded towards his study. “In there.”

Harry led the way and sat down. Remus sat opposite him. “How long is it before your eye color returns to normal?”

“It used to be almost an hour or so. Now it’s only five minutes at most.” Harry told Remus. “Why?”

“Because eventually your eye color won’t change at all.” Remus explained. “By then, it will be too late.”

“What do you mean, too late?” Harry asked.

“You’ll be completely addicted.” Remus hoped his words would sink in. “You’ll become just like Sirius.”

Harry scoffed at Remus’ prediction. “I’ll never be like him.”

“But you will Harry.” Remus held out his hand. “Give me your wands.”

Harry laid a hand on his holster. “They’re mine.”

“It’s for your own good, Harry.” Remus stepped closer. “The wands.”

Harry shook his head. “No.”

Remus had had enough, and swiftly disarmed Harry. “Now go to your room.”

Harry sulkily got up and slammed the door behind him as hard as he could. “Bastard.”

Hearing Harry’s murmured curse, Remus yanked open the door and caught up with Harry, grabbing him by the arm. “Would you care to repeat what you just said?”

Harry knew that his Dad’s hearing was good but he’d barely raised his voice, and hadn’t expected Remus to hear him. “Not really.”

Remus frowned. “I want an apology right now, Harry Lupin.”

“Sorry.” Harry’s tone came out as aggressive rather than truly repentant. “Can I go now?”

“Once you’ve apologized and actually mean it.” Remus crossed his arms. “I’m waiting.”

Harry dropped his head. “Sorry, Dad.”

“Now go to your room, and stay there.” Remus ordered. “Pasha will bring your meals.”

"But it's the holidays." Harry protested.

Remus was tired and fed up with Harry's backchat. "That's two Hogsmeade visits you've just forfeited."

"You can't do that. We're not even in school." Harry knew that he should shut up but he was angry at his Dad for taking away his wands.

"I can do whatever I like." Remus pointed out. "Now get to your room before I take anymore weekends off you."

Harry wanted to hurt Remus. "Sirius wouldn't take away my wands."

Knowing what was driving Harry, Remus tried to tamp down on his temper. "That's only because he wants you to become like just him."

"I don't care." Harry yelled. "I want my wands back."

Remus now knew that Harry was seriously addicted if after such a short time he couldn't stand to be parted from his wands. "You can't have them back."

Harry lost it. "I hate you."

Remus still felt hurt even though he knew that Harry didn't really mean it. "Harry, please go to bed."

"No." Harry shook his head. "I want my wands back."

Remus watched in alarm as ornaments on the shelves began to vibrate. Harry hadn't performed accidental magic since he was a small child. "Harry, you need to calm down."

Harry's eyes grew darker. "Give me my wands back."

Remus petrified Harry. "Sorry but you're going to hurt yourself."

Remus walked back into his study and locked up Harry's wands before returning to where Harry was frozen in place. Picking him up, Remus carried Harry upstairs before placing him down on the floor of his bedroom, and locking the door. He then released Harry. "Harry, you should be able to put down your wand and walk away."

"I need them." Harry could already feel his fingers itching.

"You don't need them. You need to perform dark magic." Remus was beyond angry at Sirius. "With all the dark magic you've been practicing, the kill tonight tipped the scales for you."

Harry refused to look at Remus. "You hate me."

"No, I don't." Remus had always hoped he'd never have to help anyone kick a dark magic addiction again. "If I didn't care, I'd give you the wands back."

"I don't believe you. I'm going." Harry touched the Potter family ring. "Heart's Messenger."

"You're going nowhere Harry." Remus headed towards the door. "I've put up wards against all forms of travel into and out of the house."

"You've got no right to do that." Harry ground out.

"You gave me the right when you signed temporary custody of the house over to me." Remus pointed out. "Now try and get some sleep."

"Go to hell." Harry snapped.

Remus' eyes were a vivid amber when he turned back to face Harry. "I'm going to forgive you for your language this time as I know it's Sirius' fault that you're like this."

"Whatever." Harry went to storm into the bathroom only for Remus to grab him by the arm. Harry found himself firmly held over Remus' knee as his Dad applied several sharp slaps onto his bottom before pulling Harry up onto his feet.

Harry backed away, more shamed than hurt. "I don't see why you're punishing me. It's entirely your fault that I'm like this. You're the one who nodded at me when the Dark Lord asked me if I should forgive that man."

Remus explained why he'd done it. "If you'd forgiven him, then you'd have embarrassed Sirius. He would have punished you for it."

"He's punished me before." Harry pointed out.

Remus knew that Harry had no idea what Sirius was really capable of. "When he punished Angelus for interfering, Angelus was left pretty much close to death."

"He'd never do that to me." Harry knew he was lying to himself but, still angry at Remus' actions, couldn't bear to admit to Remus that he was right.

"He would, Harry." Remus sighed. "And he would probably have made me watch."

Harry's anger dissipated at the forlorn look on Remus' face. "I'm sorry."

"I'm going to sleep here tonight, Harry." Remus nodded towards the bathroom. "Get showered and then come and get into bed."

Harry did as he was told. "Why didn't we have to stay?"

"Because the Dark Lord had proven his point." Remus had a feeling that if the two Death Eaters hadn't so fortuitously spoken up when they did, that Harry would have had to kill the Muggles instead. "I think even the Dark Lord draws the line at exposing you to what was going to take place."

Harry blushed as he realized what Remus meant. "I'm glad."

“So am I.” Remus got up and stroked Harry’s hair away from his face. “Harry, I’m not going to lie to you. The next 24 hours are going to be extremely unpleasant for you.”

Harry suddenly felt frightened. “You won’t leave me, will you?”

“I promise I won’t.” Remus lay down next to Harry who clung to his Dad as he fell asleep.

Remus awoke to find Harry pulling at the door. “Let me out.”

“I can’t Harry.” Remus went over to Harry, only for Harry to lash out at him.

“Don’t touch me.” Harry’s face was sweaty and his breathing panicked. “I need my wands. I’m going to die if I don’t get them.”

Remus hated this part. With Dae it had been even harder as he’d been a fully grown man. If Remus hadn’t been a werewolf, he doubted that he’d had ever been able to cope without having to restrain his friend. “Harry, you need to relax.”

Harry backed up against the door. “I don’t want to relax. I want my wands.”

Remus tried reasoning with Harry. “Harry, I can’t let you become like Sirius. If I gave you the wands now, then I’d be condemning you to become just like him.”

Harry laughed bitterly. “Why not condemn me? It’s your fault he’s like this anyway.”

Remus hesitated. “What are you going on about?”

“Sirius showed me a memory.” Harry suddenly felt powerful as he watched doubt creep onto Remus’ face. “He became a Death Eater because of you.”

Remus ignored Harry’s comment, and held out his hand. “You know that isn’t true. Now please come and sit down, Harry.”

Harry disregarded Remus' plea and marched over to the cabinet before dragging out his pensieve. "Give me a wand."

Remus shook his head. "I can't."

"Take the memory from me then." Harry ordered as he closed his eyes, trying to ignore the dizziness that was threatening to overwhelm him.

Deciding to humor Harry, Remus did as Harry asked and a memory came away which Remus slid into the bowl. "So Harry, what's this memory about?"

Hoping that Remus would relent and give him his wands back once he realized that it was all his fault, Harry held out his shaking hand. "I'll show you."

Next chapter: Sirius' memory

Chapter 54: A Light At the End of the Tunnel

This chapter is pretty angsty but hopefully it will be the last one like this for a while. Things will begin to pick up pace after this chapter.

Remus took Harry's hand and submerged himself in the memory.

20th September 1981

Regulus Black apparated into the kitchen of the cottage. As he appeared, he felt wards slam down around him. "Sirius, I'm here. What is it with the wards?"

"Regulus." Sirius inclined his head at his brother. "I need to talk to you alone and I don't want us to be disturbed."

"What about?" Regulus felt uncomfortable. "If I recall, the last time we spoke, you told me to go to hell."

"Where have you been?" Sirius ignored Regulus' comment.

"I finally got out. I left the Dark Lord." Regulus wanted to see Sirius' reaction but wasn't really surprised when his brother betrayed no emotion. "I was helping Muggle prisoners to escape, and he found out. I managed to avoid the fate he'd chosen for me, and I've been in hiding ever since."

Sirius waved a hand in the air. "Have you been hiding here?"

Regulus had been. "It doesn't matter where I was. You said in your owl that it was urgent."

Sirius was curious. "If you were in hiding, how did my owl find you?"

"I have to leave for supplies occasionally." Regulus told him. "It was just by chance that the bird managed to run into me before I returned."

"When you disappeared, I searched for you." Sirius watched Regulus' face light up.

"I thought you hated me." Regulus smiled happily. "It's good to know that it's not true."

Sirius couldn't help the look of dismay that flickered across his face.

Regulus' face fell. "What's wrong?"

Sirius almost couldn't look at Regulus. "I've got to do something I'm not going to enjoy."

As Sirius rarely got upset, Regulus was concerned for his brother despite their estrangement. "Whatever it is, you can tell me. I'll help you in any way that I can."

Sirius pulled out a silver mask and placed it on the table. "I'm sorry, Reg."

Regulus went white. "No, you can't be him."

Sirius sighed heavily. "But I am."

Regulus knew that if it was true, then he was going to die at his own brother's hand. "But you can't be. Amicus is a killer."

"I'm well aware of that." Sirius picked his mask back up. "Do you know, Reg, I was so proud when you accepted your invitation to join the Dark Lord."

"You were my sponsor weren't you?" Regulus had always wondered who'd sponsored him; he'd always suspected Lucius Malfoy.

"I was." Sirius confirmed his guess. "So you can only imagine my disappointment when you came to me for help."

"That's why you refused isn't it?" Regulus felt sick. "You weren't disgusted with me because I'd joined the Dark Lord, but because I wanted to leave him."

Sirius remembered how glad he'd been when it appeared that Regulus had had a change of heart. "When you seemed to put aside your doubts, I thought you'd changed your mind. I watched you rise up in the ranks, Accredo." Sirius continued. "I've never felt more ashamed than when my Master discovered you'd been helping Muggles to escape."

"And I'd do it again." Regulus informed his brother.

"You don't deserve to bear the Dark Mark." Sirius looked disappointedly at Regulus. "You could have risen to take your place at my side, but you failed. Do you have any idea who's taken your place now?"

Regulus knew because Remus had told him when he'd bitten him, but he couldn't let Sirius know that. "No, but I'm sure you're going to tell me."

"The werewolf." Sirius informed his brother. "A dark creature has risen up to serve in the upper echelons of the Dark Lord's order."

"I thought Remus was your friend." Regulus protested.

"He was, until I found him in bed with my fiancée." Sirius barked out.

"The fiancée you stole from me." Regulus flung back at him. "Eleanor was my girlfriend until you came along."

Until today, Sirius hadn't really spared a thought for Eleanor since the night she'd died. "I think we're both better off without her anyway. It's not as if you're pining over her memory."

Knowing now who Sirius was, Regulus suddenly realized something. "Her death wasn't accidental was it?"

Sirius shook his head. "I couldn't let the traitorous bitch live."

Regulus let his revulsion show. "You could have just ended the engagement. How could you do that to someone who simply made a stupid mistake?"

"Quite easily actually. I broke her neck and left her body hanging from the apple tree in her parents' front yard." Sirius grinned. "Dear Mummy and Daddy, Sirius doesn't love me anymore. I don't want to live without him. Love Eleanor."

"You bastard." Regulus lashed out with his fist before doubling up in pain.

Sirius smirked as he wiped the blood from his nose. "I'll let you have that one for free."

Regulus let out a sigh of relief as the pain abated. He should have known better than to hit a man he'd sworn never to attack unless requested to do so. "Why did you let Remus live?"

"I owed Lupin a debt for leading Snivellus into the Shrieking Shack." Sirius explained. "Snivellus was supposed to be my first kill."

"I still can't believe you became a Death Eater." Regulus shook his head. "You hated everything about dark magic."

"Why does it matter?" Sirius pulled out a chair and indicated that Regulus should do the same.

Regulus sat down. "Because I think I have a right to know why you would choose to put the wishes of your master before the life of your own brother."

"Fair enough." Reaching over to the dresser behind him, Sirius grabbed the bottle of firewhiskey he'd brought with him. "I was going to use this to toast your memory after I killed you if you turned up, but I can't see why we shouldn't have a drink now."

"Thanks, I think." Regulus took a mouthful of the firewhiskey directly from the bottle, and shuddered as it burned his throat.

"So what do you want to know?" Sirius grabbed the bottle and poured some of its contents into two glasses, before pushing one back towards Regulus.

"My main question is why did you join at all?" Regulus asked. "Mother and Father both knew how you felt about dark magic. They weren't going to push you to join. They were satisfied that I wanted to become a Death Eater."

"Do you remember when I spent most of my summer in the library just before I started fourth year?" Sirius asked.

Regulus nodded. "I was totally fed up you wouldn't have anything to do with me."

"I was trying to find out how to become an animagus in order to help Lupin cope on the night of the full moon. Potter, Pettigrew and I all eventually mastered the animagus transformation during our fifth year. However, during that summer I found a book on the Dark Arts that I began to read."

Regulus was astounded. "You should have known better than to touch something like that."

"It was almost as if it was calling to me." Sirius had eventually realized that the book had had some sort of enthrallment spell on it, but by then he didn't care. "The more I read, the more I wanted to know. I soon put my newly found knowledge to the test. I first tried one spell, then another and another."

"But that didn't mean you needed to join the Dark Lord." Regulus pointed out.

"True, but Father discovered what I had been doing. He made me show him what I'd learnt. On my sixteenth birthday, he took me to meet Lord Voldemort. I was promised access to much darker magic. There was a price to pay though." Sirius stopped to take a mouthful of the firewhiskey.

"You had to make a kill, didn't you?" Regulus asked.

"I did. Despite being enamored of the Dark Arts back then, I wasn't able to face up to killing someone in cold blood, so I chose Lupin to

do the job in my stead.” Sirius didn’t mind admitting that he wasn’t born a killer. “However, Potter stepped in and prevented Snivellus’ death. I was punished for my failure quite severely; first by Father, and then by the Dark Lord. Father didn’t want me to fail again so he helped me to get over my initial reluctance. I’d had plenty of practice before I was called upon again to fulfill my duty to the Dark Lord.”

“Who was it?” Regulus wondered who Sirius’ second target had been.

“Do you remember Crystal George?” Sirius asked.

Regulus remembered the pretty seventh year head girl, and what had happened to her, only too well. “That was you?”

Sirius didn’t look bothered. “Yes. She was so nice and accommodating, until she realized that I had a little more planned for her than a romp in the astronomy tower. It was almost a shame to kill her.”

“You didn’t kill her, you massacred her.” Regulus could still remember how he felt when he’d read about the girl’s death as well as the photos the Prophet had published. “I don’t think I’ll ever forget finding out what you’d done to her.”

“My creativity served me well.” Sirius informed his brother. “It wasn’t too much longer after that that I made the progression to stand at my Master’s side.”

Regulus couldn’t believe what he was hearing. “But no-one had ever heard of you until you suddenly became the Dark Lord’s right-hand man.”

“You knew me better as Decus.” Sirius informed Regulus. “The Dark Lord bestowed my new name upon me as I earned his favor.”

Regulus recoiled in disgust. “Favor? You mean by becoming his assassin, don’t you?”

“I am so much more than that.” Sirius shook his head sadly. “You were meant to eventually stand beside me. You still can.”

Regulus snorted. "I think I'll pass."

"Pity." Sirius stood up. "I think it's time we got on with it."

Regulus shook his head. "You said you'd answer my questions."

Sirius impatiently sat down again. "Make it quick; my time is limited."

Feeling nervous at Sirius' barely veiled threat, Regulus hurriedly asked another question. "Why didn't you tell me about joining?"

"Because we were barely speaking at the time. If you remember that was when I supposedly stole Eleanor from you." Sirius shrugged. "Anyway, it's not as if I have any regrets now about joining."

"But you obviously did back then. You could have told your friends when you knew you were getting in too deep; it was because of Remus that you got into it in the first place. Why didn't you tell them?" Regulus watched as his brother's face took on a look of uncertainty.

"Because even though we'd all accepted Lupin, I was afraid that my friends would turn away from me if I told them." Sirius admitted. "I wanted to tell Lupin but I knew how guilty he would feel if I told him it was because of him. Back then, I still wanted to be his friend."

Regulus frowned. "What about Pettigrew?"

"He was nothing more than a hanger-on; Potter used to make fun of him when he wasn't there. Only Lupin took the moral high ground." Sirius hadn't really liked Pettigrew all that much and had only put up with him because Remus had felt sorry for the boy.

"What about James Potter? I thought he was your best friend." Regulus persisted with his questioning.

"He was until he betrayed me to Dumbledore. After Dumbledore discovered that I'd led Snivellus deliberately up the tunnel to the Shack, he made my life a living hell. Potter gave Dumbledore a map we'd perfected just before we started sixth year. It showed where

everyone was in Hogwarts. Dumbledore tried to work out how we'd done it and couldn't. I extracted the memory of how to make the map and placed it in a pensieve so that I could find it later." Sirius refilled both glasses. "Dumbledore threatened me several times when I failed to tell him how to reproduce it. Luckily McGonagall stopped him picking on me, even though she didn't know the truth behind it."

"That's why you wanted me to obliviate you, isn't it? I wondered why you'd asked me to do it, especially as we weren't really speaking." Sirius had sought out Regulus and begged him to remove a small portion of his memory.

"It is. After that time, I merely tolerated Potter and Pettigrew. If Remus hadn't had such loose morals then I think we would still have been friends now." Sirius grimaced at the thought of his three former friends.

"But you were the best man at the Potters' wedding." Regulus couldn't believe that Sirius hadn't had any real feelings for his best friend.

"You know what they say about keeping your friends close and your enemies closer. Potter was a fount of knowledge about what was happening at the Ministry after we both joined the Auror Corps. With his father being who he was, Potter had access to far more information than I ever did." Sirius could see that Regulus was appalled by his behavior, but he didn't really care. "Besides, for a Mudblood his wife is awfully good to look at. You never know, she might grow bored of her sanctimonious husband and leave him."

Regulus laughed derisively. "Lily Potter would never give herself to a Death Eater."

"Ah, but she doesn't know I'm a Death Eater, does she?" Sirius pointed out.

"Well at least I'm going to die knowing that she's safe." Regulus took satisfaction knowing that Lily was secure from Sirius' attentions.

Sirius suddenly realized something. "It was you who told them they needed to go into hiding, wasn't it? You were privy to all those meeting where we discussed them."

Regulus bowed. "I'm pleased to say that yes it was."

Sirius smirked. "It'll do no good. We're going to find their secret-keeper eventually. Remember, I know everyone they do, little brother."

"They didn't trust you enough to make you their secret-keeper though, did they?" Regulus taunted his brother.

"On the contrary, they refused my offer as they didn't want to jeopardize my life being such a high profile friend of Potter's." Sirius laughed. "I'm going to kill Potter myself when I find them."

Regulus was almost too afraid to ask his next question. "What about Lily?"

"Despite her unfortunate heritage, I still want her so the Dark Lord has promised her to me." Sirius smiled lasciviously as he thought about Lily. "It's such a shame about the baby."

Regulus frowned. "What baby?"

"You didn't know? Potter knocked dear Lily up." Sirius looked delighted to have information that Regulus didn't.

Regulus had no idea that Sirius was still in touch with the Potters. "How could you know that?"

"Potter told me just before he went into hiding. It's why he married Lily in the first place." Sirius informed him.

"What are you going to do with the baby?" Regulus felt his stomach going over.

"I'm afraid it's going to die." Sirius didn't like killing children, but his Master had said that this child would pose a threat to him if it continued to live. "However, I won't be the one to do that."

Regulus got up and backed from his brother. "I'm ashamed to call you my brother. You make me sick."

Sirius didn't want to listen to Regulus berating him, and got up as well. "Enough. It's time to end this now."

Regulus took one final mouthful of the firewhiskey before wiping his now sweaty palms on his trousers. He then walked outside and faced Sirius before dropping his wand.

"Pick it up." Sirius ordered.

Regulus shook his head. "Just do it."

"No. Now pick up your wand before I pick you up and dangle you head first off that cliff over there." Sirius threatened.

Regulus blanched. He'd been afraid of heights ever since he could remember, and Sirius knew it. Bending down, he picked up his wand.

"Now that's more like it." Sirius bowed.

Regulus did the same. He'd barely straightened up before sending a curse at Sirius, which took his brother by surprise, as a flaming cut appeared on his arm quickly followed by a second cut on his leg.

Sirius, however, barely flinched as he threw a similar curse back at Regulus. "How about a taste of your own medicine?"

Regulus ducked while at the same time sending a blasting curse in his brother's direction. Sirius easily threw up a shield and dispelled the spell. He then sent a bone-breaking spell at Regulus, who hadn't expected Sirius to react so quickly, and didn't quite get out of the way in time. The curse clipped his elbow, shattering the bone there and rendering his arm useless; luckily it wasn't his wand arm.

Sirius smirked as a purple light raced towards him. "You seem to have forgotten that the Black family ring has a few tricks up its sleeve." Without bothering to move, he took the full impact of the spell before sending the same spell back at his brother.

Anticipating such a response, Regulus was ready and easily dispelled the curse. He then sent a second curse towards Sirius who quickly put up a reflective shield which bounced the curse back towards Regulus. Regulus hit the ground. If it had hit him, it would have made all the blood boil in his body.

Sirius laughed. "You're almost as ruthless as I am. It's a pity I'm going to have to kill you." He then sent a curse towards Regulus that he knew would kill his brother instantly.

Recognizing the curse, Regulus invoked an umbrella shield which caused the spell to splinter and vanish. He shook his head at Sirius. "A heart-stopping curse. You usually do more damage to your victims."

Sirius ducked as a bright green spell flew over his head. "You're family. I thought I'd cut you a break."

"You're too kind." Regulus sent a second spell catapulting towards Sirius, catching him on the face.

Sirius swore as a cut opened from his forehead to his chin. "Bastard."

Regulus gulped as Sirius stopped going easy on him, and began to throw spell after spell at him, barely giving him time to erect a shield, let alone get out of the way. Eventually a spell shattered his shield, causing Regulus to scream as shards of glass entered his body, burning as they made contact. He was saved from a decapitation spell as he collapsed under the onslaught of the pain, and dropped his wand.

Sirius walked over to his brother and picked up the fallen wand. "I should just Avada you now."

Regulus was struggling to breathe as the glass shards continued to work their way into his body. "Then just fucking do it."

Sirius ignored him and snapped Regulus' wand before throwing the pieces over the cliff, before turning to smile smugly at his brother. "It seems such a shame for you to be parted from your wand."

Regulus shook his head frantically as he caught onto Sirius' meaning. "Please Siri, don't do that to me."

"Sorry Reg. You had the chance of going out quickly. I think a suspension spell first; I don't want that glass killing you before I'm ready." Sirius stopped the glass from sinking in any deeper before casting Mobilicorpus.

"Just kill me, for Merlin's sake." Regulus found himself hovering towards the edge of the cliff.

"I don't think so." Sirius maneuvered Regulus so that he was facing downwards. "I'd like for you to see what's waiting for you."

Regulus looked down at the large drop and found that his throat had closed up.

"What's wrong Reg? Nothing to say?" Sirius caused Regulus to drop slightly, causing his brother to whimper. "I'll give you one last chance. Say you'll repent and rejoin our Master's cause. It's not too late, even now."

Believing that Sirius was just toying with him, Regulus finally found his voice. "You can go to hell."

"I probably will, but you'll be there first." Sirius turned away before cancelling the spell. As Regulus' screams came to an abrupt end, Sirius sank to his knees and buried his face in his hands. "I'm sorry Reg."

With tears running down his face, Sirius got up and dropped the wards he'd erected, before apparating out.

Present Time

Harry turned to Remus. "Will you give me my wands now?"

Remus was white and shaking. "No, Harry."

Remus then pulled out of the memory and marched over to the fireplace and threw floo power in before placing his hand on the stone inset into it. "Sanctuary."

Dae's head appeared in the flames. "Remus, what's...?" His voice died away at the forlorn look on Remus' face. "Do you want me to come through?"

Remus mutely nodded, and kept his hand on the stone. A few moments later Dae stepped into the room. He looked from Harry to Remus. Deciding Remus needed him more, he laid a hand on his friend's shoulder. "What's wrong?"

Remus nodded towards the pensieve. "Last memory."

Harry said nothing as he watched Dae freeze as he touched the pensieve.

Twenty minutes later Dae emerged looking shaken. "I can't believe he actually cared."

Remus didn't respond and just sat staring at the floor. Dae walked over to Remus and knelt down in front of his friend. Dae then laid a hand on Remus' arm. "Remus, I know what I said in there but please believe me when I say that I don't blame you for what happened to Sirius."

Remus bowed his head, tears running down his face. "If I hadn't been a werewolf then he'd never have wanted to become an animagus."

Curled up in the corner, Harry watched as Remus literally fell apart in front of him. He hadn't intended to upset his Dad this much. He just wanted his wands back. Scared, he continued to huddle, shaking in the corner.

Dae swung round on Harry. "How did he get this memory?"

Harry recoiled at the angry look on Dae's face. "Sirius showed it to me."

Dae stalked over to Harry before grasping his chin in his hand and carefully examining his face. "He really did a number on you, didn't he?"

Harry started to cry. "I'm sorry; I just wanted my wands back."

Remus didn't move as Harry's weeping grew louder. Dae gently picked Harry up and carried him over to the bed. "It's going to be alright Harry. Your Dad will be fine."

Harry couldn't stop shaking. Dae swore and walked back over to Remus. "Remus, I need you to open the wards for me."

Almost automatically Remus got up and put his hand on the fireplace. Dae then apparated out before returning with Anna. "Can you see to Remus? He's in shock. Harry's suffering from what looks like dark magic withdrawal."

Anna shook her head. "I think we should get Lily. Harry needs her."

Dae thought about the memory. "Okay, but hide the pensieve first."

Anna wanted to quiz Dae about the pensieve but hurriedly shoved it under the bed before apparating out. Dae called out. "French."

The small house-elf appeared with several large glasses of scotch. "Master Dae."

"Thanks." Dae took one of the glasses and walked over to Remus. "Drink this."

Remus automatically knocked back the glass before dropping it to the floor, scotch spilling everywhere as the glass refilled itself.

Dae had never seen Remus so devastated before. A crack signaled Anna's return. Lily took one look at her son and rushed over to him. "Harry, sweetie, I'm here."

By now, Harry was beside himself with guilt. "It's my fault. I just wanted my wands back. I shouldn't have shown him the memory." Harry then buried his face in Lily's chest and cried.

Lily pulled a sleeping potion out of her pocket and dosed Harry with it. "Why didn't anyone do this before?"

"Because he's going through dark magic withdrawal." Dae told her. "He should be alright now though I think."

"I'm going to kill bloody Sirius if it's the last thing I do." Lily had had enough of her husband. "And what's this memory Harry was going on about?"

Remus finally found his voice. "It's my fault, Lily."

Lily looked totally lost as did Anna. Dae knew that he couldn't cope with an upset Lily as well so he knew he'd have to simply outline the memory. "Lily, I need you to tell Anna about Amicus. I can't."

Lily was surprised that Anna didn't know. "Anna, Sirius is Amicus."

Anna's face reflected her shock, and she threw herself onto Dae. "I'm so, so sorry, Dae."

Lily was really confused now. "What did I miss?"

Dae dropped his glamour. "Hi Lily."

"Regulus!" Lily couldn't believe that Dae was the Slytherin who'd made it patently clear that he hated Muggleborns and half-bloods and that Voldemort had been right in his ideals.

Dae sighed as he re-established the glamour he always wore. "I haven't really got time to go into detail, but Remus found out today that Sirius became a Death Eater because of a book on dark magic

he'd found in the Black library; a book he found when Sirius was trying to find something to help Remus when he went through his transformations."

Lily knelt down in front of Remus. "It's not your fault, Remus. Sirius could easily have discovered that book at any time."

"But he didn't." Remus pointed out miserably. "Harry said earlier that it was my fault he was stuck in this mess, and he's right, it is."

Anna had had enough. "Remus Lupin, for someone of extreme intelligence, sometimes you can be bloody stupid."

Dae swung round on his fiancée. "Anna!"

"No, Dae." Anna turned back on Remus. "I've had enough of the pity party. Yes, Black found a book when he was helping you. He didn't have to read it though, did he? The stupid git would have known what it was before he opened it. You don't become an out and out killer just because you indulge in dark magic."

Anna's words finally seemed to get through to Remus, and he shuddered before wiping his arm across his eyes. "You're probably right but I still feel as if this mess would never have happened if I hadn't been a werewolf."

"None of this mess would have ever happened if the alternate Harry hadn't decided to mess with the timeline." Lily sensibly pointed out. "Instead of pointing fingers at ourselves, we need to do something to get rid of the main cause of all our problems; Voldemort."

Anna agreed. "Lily's right."

Dae looked over to Harry. "He should be back on his feet by tomorrow, but he needs to cut right back on any dark magic he's been doing. What sent him over the edge anyway?"

Remus swallowed hard. "He killed one of a couple of Death Eaters who'd been making fun of him and Jamie."

Lily's face dropped. "Did Jamie have to as well?"

Remus reluctantly nodded. "Jamie used the Imperius and made the Death Eater do it himself. Harry, on the other hand, had no problem dispatching someone with a killing curse."

Anna shook her head. "I can't believe that the little boy I used to look after has ended up like this."

Instead of getting upset, Lily's face became determined. "I'm going to free my children from that monster if it's the last thing I do. I'm still working on the Dark Mark, and I actually think I'm almost there."

Dae looked hopefully at Lily, and held out his arm. "Is there any chance?"

Lily could have kicked herself at forgetting about Dae's mark. "Hold out your arm and grit your teeth. I think this is going to be painful."

Dae dropped the glamour from his Dark Mark and did as Lily told him. As she worked on the Mark, Dae broke out into a sweat. "Is there any chance we can take a break?"

Lily glanced up. "Sorry but I can't stop now, or the Mark will kill you."

Anna and Remus watched as Dae grew paler and paler as Lily's work progressed. Eventually she drew to a halt. "There's only one link left to go but I haven't worked out how to neutralize it yet."

"What link?" Dae asked as he wiped the sweat from his face.

"The link to your soul. If the Dark Lord was to try and take you down with him now, he wouldn't kill you but he might as well have, as your soul would be forfeit." Lily had spent hours trying to figure out the charm that tied the soul to Voldemort but had come up empty so far.

Remus looked over to where Harry was sleeping. "Can you do anything for Harry?"

Lily walked over and parted Harry's hair before examining the mark. "His is the same. I can help alleviate some of the pain he feels when he's called and start to unravel it but I can't go much further than that without Sirius finding out."

"Do it while he's sleeping." Dae suggested.

Harry slept on, oblivious to Lily's work. By the time she'd finished, she was exhausted. "I think I should bring Jamie home from Ron's."

"I doubt he'll be called again before school starts. At least there are no meetings scheduled as far as I'm aware." Remus told Lily.

Lily stretched. "Maybe you're right. Sirius said that Alice is going to cover his emergency room shifts next week." Lily pulled a face. "He wants to spend time with me before I go to Hogwarts."

Anna frowned. "Why don't we just kill him now?"

Remus shook his head. "We can't. As we think Harry is the Boy Who Lived, we need Sirius around to get Harry close to the Dark Lord."

Lily didn't say anything but in spite of what Sirius had done, she still felt dismayed at the thought of him dying. Remus reached out and squeezed her hand. "Don't think about it, Lily."

Lily squeezed Remus' hand back before turning to the others. "I need to talk about something else. Would you all like to listen to the problems I'm having with the Dark Mark?"

Anna looked chastened. "Sorry, Lily, I didn't think."

"It's okay, Anna." Lily smiled briefly at her friend. "Let's brainstorm."

The four friends then spent the rest of the day discussing the problems Lily was having with the Dark Mark. By the end of the session, Lily finally had a few ideas she could work on.

Suddenly Harry began to thrash in his sleep. Lily jumped up. "He shouldn't be dreaming."

“This is why I didn’t give him anything.” Dae’s voice didn’t hold any censure, just concern.

Harry’s eyes flew open and Remus was relieved to see that they were back to his usual clear green. “Harry, are you alright?”

Harry couldn’t look at Remus. “I’m sorry Dad.”

“It’s alright Harry. I’m fine.” Remus reassured his son. “How are you feeling?”

“Not great.” Harry rubbed his head. “My head hurts.”

Lily pulled a pain potion from out of her cloak. “Drink this.”

Harry knocked it back. “Thanks.”

Lily took the empty vial. “Do you want anything to eat?”

Harry shook his head. “Not right now.” He sat up. “What time is it?”

“Almost four.” Lily told him. “I gave you a dreamless sleep potion, so you’ve slept most of the day.”

“It didn’t work very well.” Harry informed Lily. “From what I can remember, I’ve done nothing but dream.”

Dae wasn’t surprised. “I think it might have something to do with your dark magic withdrawal.”

Harry shook his head. “I don’t think so. These weren’t normal dreams; they were more of the other Harry’s memories.” Harry suddenly surprised everyone by grinning. “I know how to kill Voldemort.”

Next Chapter: Harry returns to school; Hermione discovers the truth; Harry uncovers more memories and discovers what Dumbledore is searching for; one couple breaks up and a friendship ends forever.

Chapter 55: Fifth Year Begins

2nd September 1995

Harry sat nervously awaiting the arrival of his friends. Remus put a hand on his shoulder. "Harry, they won't suddenly stop being your friends. They knew what you were training for and what was likely to happen."

Harry wasn't convinced. "But they don't know what I did to that man or to you."

Remus knew that Harry was still having trouble with upsetting him. "Harry, as I keep telling you, I'm fine now. It was a bit of a shock when you first showed the memory to me, but Lily and the others are right, I didn't make Sirius take the path he chose."

"Is Maman coming today?" Harry was nervous about seeing Lily, who had only arrived early that morning with Cassie in tow.

"Harry, Lily doesn't blame you either." Remus could see that Harry was going to worry himself sick. "Dae and I both warned her about the memory but she still insisted on seeing it."

Instead of falling to pieces as Remus had, Lily had exploded. It had taken all of Remus' diplomacy to stop her from going home and attempting to rip Sirius apart. Once her anger had been spent, Lily had retreated behind a cold mask, rebuffing any attempt to comfort her.

The door suddenly opened and Lily walked in. "I'm the first one here, I see."

"Where's Cassie?" Harry wondered what Lily had done with his little sister.

"I left her with Poppy; she still isn't feeling that well." Lily had chosen to arrive on a Saturday as Cassie had come down with muggle measles, something wizards just had to let run their course. Lily then took out a book and sat down.

Harry hated the cold façade that Lily now wore. He felt she'd shatter if he touched her. "Are you alright, Maman?"

"I'm fine, Harry." Lily's tone was short.

Remus personally thought that Lily would have done better to break down and cry, instead of retreating behind an icy wall, but he'd been knocked back every time he'd tried to talk to her about it.

One by one the others arrived, Jamie being the last one. "Hi Harry."

Harry's face lit up at the sight of his brother and moved over to hug him, surprising the other children.

George took point. "Harry, is there something you're not telling us?"

"I'll explain in a moment." Harry span round as the door opened again, and Hermione walked in.

Hermione nervously walked by Harry and sat down next to Luna, who beamed happily at her friend. Remus had told her about the meeting, and, even though she and Harry weren't speaking, that she might want to be there.

Trying not to look at Hermione, Harry closed and locked the door. "I'm not really sure where to start."

Katie smiled gently at him. "Why don't you start at the beginning?"

Harry took a deep breath. "I took the Dark Mark before my birthday as some of you already know." Harry couldn't go on, so Lily got up. "Do you want me to tell them?"

Harry nodded gratefully. "Please."

Lily's voice was quiet but clear. "Before Harry took the Dark Mark, he demanded to know Amicus' identity."

Hermione gasped. "Did he tell him?"

Lily nodded. "Yes, Hermione, he did."

George raised an eyebrow. "So, who he is then, Harry?"

"He can't tell you because of an oath he's sworn." Lily's face was like stone. "But I can." Despite her collected appearance, Lily's stomach was churning. "Amicus is my husband."

Hermione dropped her head into her hands as she finally understood why Harry had pushed her away. Even without being told, she knew that Sirius hated her, and had to admit that the feeling was mutual. She wondered how Severus was going to take the news.

Draco, however, burst out laughing. "You really expect me to believe that it's Uncle Sirius? He hates Death Eaters."

"No, Draco, he doesn't." Lily knew that Draco was going to be pretty upset when he accepted the truth.

Draco realized that Lily was serious. "Is that why Jamie's here?"

Lily shook her head. "Not exactly."

Jamie took Lily's place. "I'm here because I'm a Death Eater as well."

George couldn't help himself, he giggled. "Talk about keeping it in the family."

"Very funny, Weasley." Jamie snapped.

Remus got up. "That's enough boys. Is everyone clear on whom Amicus really is?" Remus watched as everyone's heads bobbed up and down. "Do you all believe Lily?"

Everyone nodded again, Draco somewhat reluctantly. Remus relaxed. "Good. Harry and I can both speak freely now. I'm going to summarize what's happened over the summer. Please remain quiet until I've finished."

Everyone responded to the authoritative tone in Remus' voice and settled back to await whatever news he decided to give them. Seeing he'd got their undivided attention, Remus continued. "Jamie and Harry were both forced to take the Dark Mark. However, Harry took the Mark early but not from the Dark Lord. As a favor, the Dark Lord allowed Amicus to mark Harry. Harry has therefore sworn to serve Amicus but has not so far been called upon to pledge allegiance to the Dark Lord himself." Remus picked up the glass of water that suddenly appeared on a lectern which had abruptly popped into existence next to him. "Unfortunately Harry's had a bit of a problem with Dark Magic; he became addicted over the summer."

All the children turned to look at Harry who merely hung his head. Draco remembered how he'd felt with the pull of the diary and interrupted Remus. "Uncle Remus, did Harry's addiction have anything to do with what the diary did to him?"

Remus wasn't sure. "We don't really know. We suspect that the diary may have made Harry more susceptible but we aren't entirely certain. Jamie wasn't affected in the same way, but he hasn't been practicing as often as Harry nor was he possessed by the diary." Remus nodded towards the pensieve that sat on a table to the left of where they were all sitting. "It would take me a while to explain everything, so instead you can see some of what's happened."

Draco felt his stomach flop over. "What's in there?"

"My initiation, a couple of training sessions I've had with Sirius, my introduction to the Death Eaters and its aftermath, and a memory of Sirius carrying out an execution." Harry knew his voice was shaking. "I'm not going in with you though; I can't relive that again."

Everyone except for Hermione and Lily moved towards the pensieve. Harry frowned at Hermione. "You don't want to see?"

Hermione shook her head. "I want to talk to you." She then waited until the others had entered the pensieve before turning to face Harry. Lily simply picked up her book and ignored them. "You dumped me because of Sirius didn't you?"

Harry wanted to deny it, but he'd missed Hermione more than he could have thought possible. "I'm sorry, Hermione, but Sirius hates you."

Hermione snorted. "I can't exactly say that I don't feel the same the way about him." Hermione took a deep breath before asking her next question. "Do you still care about me?"

Harry reluctantly nodded. "I've tried not to, but I do." Harry then frustratedly ran his hand through his hair. "As much as I want to, I can't be seen with you outside this room at all this term, Hermione. I can't afford for tales to get back to Sirius; I don't know what he might do to you if he finds out we're still friends."

"But we can meet in here can't we?" Hermione couldn't face the entire term without seeing Harry now that she knew why he'd actually rejected her in the way that he had.

"I'd like that." Harry knew that he still owed Hermione an apology. "I'm sorry for how I treated you but I was afraid for you."

"Harry, I told you I'd always be here for you and I will." Hermione didn't care how Harry had treated her; she was just glad that he'd had good reason to do it, and hadn't really meant it.

Harry looked towards the pensieve. "Hermione, before you decide you want to spend time with me, I think you should go into the pensieve and watch the memories with the others."

Hermione hesitated. Harry looked pleadingly at her. "Please, Hermione, it's important."

Seeing that Harry needed her to see the memories, Hermione acquiesced. "I'll see you later then." She then moved over to the pensieve.

Harry sat down opposite Lily. "Maman?"

"Harry?" Lily put down her book.

“Why haven’t you gotten upset over Sirius yet?” Harry asked the question his Dad and Dae had avoided asking.

“I have.” Lily remarked drily. “If you remember, I trashed your bedroom.”

“But you haven’t. You got angry.” Harry put a hand on Lily’s. “I haven’t seen you shed a single tear since you saw the memory.”

“I’ve done crying over that bastard.” Lily snapped. “I’ve got better things to do with my time, such as working out how to get rid of the Dark Mark, so if you don’t mind, Harry, I’d like to get back to my book.”

Rebuffed, Harry retreated to the other side of the room and sat down quietly to wait for everyone to come out. When they did, most of them were white-faced, Luna and Hermione had obviously both been crying, as had Draco and Jamie. Harry nervously began to pull at his hair.

Draco looked poleaxed. “I can’t believe he killed his own brother.”

Hermione walked over to Harry and threw her arms around him. “Harry, I’m so sorry.”

Harry buried his face in Hermione’s hair and tried swallowing to get rid of the lump in his throat. “Thanks, Hermione.”

Hermione then pulled away and one by one each child hugged Harry, until finally Luna wrapped herself around him. “We all still love you, you know.”

Harry felt his throat close up again and hugged Luna back. After a few moments had passed, and Harry still hadn’t let go of Luna, Dudley coughed. “I think you can let go of my girlfriend now, Harry.”

Harry blushed and released Luna. “Sorry.”

Luna simply winked at him. “You needed a hug, Harry.”

Luna was right, he had. "Thanks."

Jamie had moved to sit next to Lily and unashamedly buried his face into her shoulder. Harry realized that after Lily, the final memory was probably the hardest for Jamie to watch.

Draco walked over to Harry. "He gave me the diary, didn't he?"

Harry nodded. "I'm sorry, Draco, but yes he did."

Draco simply nodded before asking another question. "How are you coping with performing Dark Magic now?" Draco had been shocked at how hostile Harry had been towards Remus.

"I've had the odd relapse." Harry admitted. "I'm still finding it difficult to not practice it so often. Dad had to take my wands away from me in the evening."

"What are you going to do now you're back in school?" Draco knew how difficult Harry would find it without his wands.

"Rely on people like you and Dudley to help me out." Harry looked plaintively at his friend.

"I'll help you." Draco hugged Harry again. "At least you won't have to go and see Sirius while you're in school."

Harry's face fell. "He still expects me to make an appearance on every Hogsmeade weekend."

The other children, who had been listening to the exchange, expressed their dismay.

"But that's not fair." Dudley snapped. "Hogsmeade visits are supposed to be for fun."

"Not for me, they're not." Harry shrugged. "I can cope. It's not as if he's going to do me a lot of damage when I've got to go back to school afterwards."

Neville coughed nervously. "I think you're forgetting something Harry."

"What?" Harry turned to the one person he hadn't been sure of rejecting him.

"Black's a healer. There's nothing stopping him from patching you up and sending you on your way." Neville knew from experience only too well how good a healer Sirius was. "I once fell out of a tree and Mum wasn't there. Gran thought I was going to die, and flooed Black. He had me back on my feet by the end of the day."

Harry grimaced. "Thanks for pointing that out Neville."

"Sorry." Neville looked abashed.

Harry sighed. "No, Nev, I'm sorry. It's just that I was looking forward to a relatively pain free meeting with him. I should have known better."

Glancing round at the glum faces, Remus decided that everyone had had enough for the day. "I'm sorry to cut this short but I think we've been here long enough. We should get together again in two weeks' time unless something happens in the interim."

The children all filed out, except for Harry, Remus, Jamie and Lily. Hermione headed for her father's rooms.

Harry went and knelt before his brother. "Jamie?"

Jamie looked at his brother, tears streaming down his face. "I can't believe he talked about Mum like that."

Lily wished for a calming potion. "Take this."

Jamie did as Lily told him. "Mum, how can you even look at him?"

"I try not to." Lily admitted. "Do you feel better now?"

The calming potion having done its job, Jamie nodded. "A little." He then looked nervously at Harry. "Harry, can I ask you something?"

Harry wondered why Jamie was so anxious. "You know you can."

"Can I be your friend here at school?" Jamie didn't want to hide his friendship with his brother anymore.

"What about Weasley; won't he have a meltdown?" Harry didn't want to cause trouble with Jamie and his friend.

"We're no longer friends." Jamie scowled. "He caught me with his sister."

"You and Prewett?" Harry was shocked.

"It wasn't like that." Jamie then explained what had happened. "I'd only been at the Prewetts for a few days when Ginny started to make it very obvious that she was interested in me."

Harry shuddered. "Yuk."

Jamie grinned slightly. "I know. Anyway, she kept trying to touch my arm, brushing up against me, and laughing at everything I said." Jamie then grimaced. "Eventually she cornered me in the library and sat on my lap before putting her arms around my neck and kissing me. I was just pushing her away when Ron came into the room."

"Don't tell me. He went ballistic." Harry knew how volatile Prewett was.

"Yep. He accused me of taking advantage of Ginny." Jamie shook his head at the memory. "When I tried to tell him that it had been Ginny who'd come on to me, he punched me."

"What was Ginny doing when this was happening?" Remus asked.

"She was crying. She swore that I'd pulled her onto my lap and tried to kiss her." Jamie looked faintly green. "I've never been interested in her."

"I think Mr. Prewett is in need of a detention." Remus announced.

"But that won't make him be friends with me again." Jamie then shrugged. "Not that I want to be friends with him. He wouldn't even listen to my side of the story."

"I'm not doing it for that reason, Jamie." Remus explained. "He knows you're a Death Eater; we can't afford for that information to get out. I know he's sworn he wouldn't tell anyone but I can't take that chance. Ginny can't reveal who you are for obvious reasons."

"Ron didn't actually swear an oath. He just promised not to tell anyone." Jamie admitted.

Remus cursed. "Do you know where Ron is now?"

"Library." Jamie had overheard Ron telling Seamus where he was going.

Remus disappeared out of the room.

Lily also got up. "I'm going to see how the house-elves are getting on with sorting out my room. I'll see you both later."

Harry sat down next to his brother. "I'm happy if you want to hang around with us, and I'm sure the others won't mind but there's a small problem."

Jamie cottoned on to what Harry was saying straight away. "You mean Cho, don't you?"

Harry nodded. "She doesn't like any of us."

"She doesn't like me either." Jamie sighed. "We broke up on the train."

Even though Harry didn't like Cho, he felt sorry for his brother. "I'm sorry, Jamie."

Jamie shrugged. "We haven't really been getting along that well anyway. She said that I'd neglected her."

"And had you?" Harry wouldn't have been surprised if Jamie had.

Jamie nodded. "I barely wrote to her all summer. I was just too tied up with everything that's been going on."

"Do you think she'd understand if you told her the truth?" Even though Harry didn't like Cho, he still thought that Jamie could maybe tell Cho. He didn't really want to see his brother unhappy.

"It doesn't matter anyway. She's already seeing someone else." Jamie had been hurt that she'd left it to so long to tell him.

Harry wasn't surprised. "Who is it?"

"Cedric Diggory." Jamie pulled a face. "She bumped into him in Hong Kong of all places."

"But I thought she went to Hong Kong at the start of the holidays." Harry pointed out.

"She did." Jamie looked miserable.

Harry decided then that his brother was better off without her. "Do you fancy some quidditch practice?"

Jamie's face lit up. "Let me get my broom." He suddenly stopped as he remembered where his broom had come from. "On second thoughts, I don't really want to."

Harry knew what was wrong. "Just because Sirius bought your broom for you, doesn't mean you shouldn't use it."

"I'd rather burn it." As much as Jamie loved quidditch, he now couldn't bear to touch his customized Firebolt.

"Maman bought it was well." Harry reminded him.

“I just can’t.” Jamie didn’t want anything Sirius had bought for him. “I’ll come and practice but I’ll use one of the school brooms.”

Harry didn’t want Jamie being put out. “Tell you what; I’ll get us both new brooms.”

“But they’re expensive, Harry.” Jamie pointed out.

“It’s not as if I haven’t got the money.” Harry argued. “I’ll ask Dad to sort it out.”

Jamie grinned. “Thanks.”

Harry got up. “Let’s go then.”

Later that day

Hermione shot up off the sofa the moment Severus came out of his potions lab. “Papa, I need to speak to you.”

“Can it wait?” Severus indicated his clothing. “I need to change.”

As Hermione had already been waiting all afternoon, she decided that a few minutes wouldn’t make any difference. “Shall I go into your study and wait for you?”

Severus nodded and disappeared into the bedroom. Hermione went into the study. It had been a long afternoon for her. Her mother hadn’t arrived yet as she’d stayed behind to close up the house; preferring to do it herself rather than leaving it to the house-elves.

She didn’t have to wait long as Severus strode in, still buttoning up his shirt. “I take it that this is important.”

“It’s about Harry.” Hermione winced at the annoyed look that crossed Severus’ face. “I know why he pushed me away now.”

“And?” Severus could see that Hermione looked happier than she had for some time.

"It's because of Sirius Black." Hermione stood up. "Papa, he's Amicus."

Like Draco, Severus laughed. "Please, Hermione. You'd better tell Harry to come up with a better excuse than that."

"Papa, it's true." Hermione knew Severus wasn't going to enjoy what she had to tell him. "You were supposed to be his first kill."

Severus suddenly realized that Hermione was deadly serious and his face changed. "I thought it was because he didn't like me."

"Well it was definitely because of that." Hermione informed her father. "Papa, Sirius all but threatened me, which is why Harry dumped me."

Severus knew he had to see Remus. "Where's Remus?"

"He went looking for Ron Prewett about Potter. They're no longer friends." Hermione was glad. As much as she disliked Jamie, she hated Prewett.

"I need to speak to him." Severus went to leave, only for Hermione to stop him.

"There's more about Harry you should hear." Hermione watched as Severus reluctantly sat back down. "He was introduced to the other Death Eaters last month; Papa he had to kill another Death Eater."

Severus was horrified. "What happened?"

Hermione told him. "He did it very easily." Hermione hadn't told Harry but she'd felt more than a little repulsed by him when he'd quite clearly spoke the killing curse; his voice ringing out with power.

"You didn't like him for that, did you?" Severus knew his daughter too well.

Hermione shook her head. "I felt disgusted to be honest."

"You wouldn't be normal if you hadn't." Severus took Hermione's hand.

Hermione squeezed her father's hand, feeling comforted. "Papa, he became addicted to dark magic. He was absolutely vile to Professor Lupin because he took Harry's wands away from him."

Severus knew how that felt. "Hermione, I've been through it. Your mother helped me to escape my addiction and I have to be truthful, I was really cruel to her when she refused to let me have my wand to practice with."

Having no point of reference herself, Hermione wanted Severus to describe what it felt like. "What was it like?"

"You feel as if you're going to die if you can't perform just one spell. It's almost as if you're in a fever. I promised your mother anything if she'd just let me have my wand back. When she refused, I said a lot of things I regretted later." Severus had been ashamed of himself afterwards.

Hermione frowned. "But I've seen you do dark magic when you were training Harry."

"Your mother is my anchor. When I was teaching Harry, I'd talk to your mother afterwards; in fact I actually gave her my wand a couple of times after I'd finished." Severus sighed. "Once you've become addicted, the temptation to succumb to the pull of the magic will always be there."

"You mean Harry will always be tempted?" Hermione felt a little queasy at the thought.

"I'm afraid so." Severus looked seriously at his daughter. "If you decide that you want to stand by Harry throughout this, you also need to be aware that he could slip at any time. If he does, he'll do anything, even hurt you, if you get in his way."

Hermione shook her head. "He'd never hurt me."

"I wanted to hit your mother when I went through withdrawal." Severus looked embarrassed. "It took all my willpower not to do it."

"But you didn't hurt her did you?" Hermione pointed out.

"No, but I came close." Severus admitted. "If you want to stand by Harry, then I'll support you."

"Will you still support Harry?" Hermione was a little anxious about how her father felt about him.

Severus thought for a moment how to phrase his sentence. "Even if you do not, I will. Even though Amicus has claimed him for his apprentice, he was mine first."

Hermione frowned. "I don't understand."

"To go through what I put Harry through, there has to be absolute trust on both sides." Severus explained. "I had to trust him not to retaliate and he had to trust me not to push him too far." Severus could see that Hermione still didn't quite get it. "Years ago apprenticeships were the norm in pureblood families. A father would send his son or daughter to a family friend or acquaintance and they would be trained under them. Usually an oath or bond was instigated and the child would normally be integrated into his master's family."

Hermione gasped. "But that's barbaric."

"Which is why it was outlawed hundreds of years ago." Severus told her. "A type of bond had begun to grow between Harry and myself but it wasn't completed."

Hermione was intrigued. "Why not?"

"I didn't help him complete his training." Severus wished he hadn't gone on his trip when he had.

"Would Harry have turned away from Professor Lupin if the bond had been completed?" Hermione couldn't believe Severus would have done such a thing.

"No. It wasn't a binding bond, Hermione, as they once used." Severus sighed. "It was more a bond of mutual friendship and respect than one of master and servant."

Hermione finally understood. "So what you're saying is that you became a type of mentor for him?"

"Exactly." Severus smiled. "If that's everything, I really need to find Remus."

Hermione wasn't ready to let him leave yet. "Papa, why didn't I or the others have the same sort of bond with you or Professor Lupin?"

"Because Harry's training was more personal and intense. I taught him a lot more than Remus and I were teaching to everyone else." Severus could see that Hermione wasn't happy.

"I thought you were going to teach us the same things." Hermione protested.

"Neither I nor Remus would ever countenance teaching some of the darker magic to a group of schoolchildren who weren't going into the same situation as Harry was." Severus had hated teaching some of the spells to Harry. "It wouldn't have been ethical."

Hermione hesitated before accepting what Severus had told her. "I understand."

Severus stood up. "Is there anything else?"

Hermione decided telling Severus about Regulus could wait. "We can finish the conversation later if you want to."

"No, if there's more we may as well finish it now." Severus sat back down. "So what else do you have to tell me?"

"Do you remember Regulus Black?" Hermione asked.

Severus was a little taken aback at the question. "Of course I do."

“Sirius killed him.” Hermione and the others hadn’t been shown Dae revealing himself, as Harry hadn’t wanted to betray Dae’s secret without his permission. But having shown Hermione his true face, she’d recognized Regulus straight away. However as she’d sworn an oath to Dae, she couldn’t tell her father who he was.

Severus was aghast. “He killed his own brother? How?”

Hermione started to tell Severus about Harry’s memory. When she reached the part about Sirius being Decus, Severus stiffened and interrupted her discourse. “Are you sure he was this Decus?”

Hermione nodded. “Absolutely.”

Severus got up. “We can finish this later. I need to speak to Remus now.”

Hermione wondered why Severus had suddenly gone pale. “Papa, what is...?”

“Not now, Hermione.” Severus pulled open the door to his study and went in search of Remus.

Remus had just returned to his room when an insistent knocking began on his door. Pulling open his door, he found Severus standing there. “What’s wrong?”

Severus didn’t bother with small talk. “Was Decus one of the guards who raped Virginie?”

Remus nodded. “I’m sorry Severus.”

Severus was fuming. “I didn’t mean to kill Rosier, but I’m sure as hell going to kill Black.”

“You can’t.” Remus realized that Severus knew who Amicus was now, and stood his ground as Severus advanced on him. “As Sirius marked Harry and not the Dark Lord, I don’t know what would happen to Harry if Sirius was to die.”

"Damn him to hell." Severus turned round and punched the wall closest to him.

Remus winced as he heard a loud snap. "Let me take a look, Severus."

Severus held out his hand. "I can't believe Black might be Hermione's father."

"You need his blood don't you?" Remus worked on healing Severus' hand.

"Can you get it?" Severus felt relieved as the pain dissipated. He should have known better than to risk his hand.

"I can't, but Lily might be able to." Remus indicated that Severus should sit down.

"How did she take the news about Black?" Severus took the seat closest to the fire.

"Not well." Remus sat down opposite. "What made it worse was seeing the memory of Sirius killing his brother; he pretty much told Regulus that Lily was to be his prize after James had been killed."

Severus winced. "Do you think Lily will help me?"

"Do you mind me telling her about Virginie?" Remus countered.

"No." Severus knew he could trust Lily.

"Then I'll ask her." Remus then decided to tell Severus about Lily's advances with the Dark Mark. "Lily's almost figured out how to unravel the Dark Mark."

Severus' interest was immediately diverted. "How?"

"I'm no charms expert and didn't understand half of what she explained." Remus thought himself pretty intelligent, but he'd been

baffled by some of the terms that Lily had employed. "Do you want me to firecall her; she's here now."

Severus nodded. "If you think she won't mind."

Half an hour later, Severus was left looking at the clear skin of his left arm. "It's gone."

"You weren't bound to his soul, Severus." Lily wished the others marks could be so easily removed. "You're free of it now."

Severus was overcome. "Thank you."

"I'll do anything I can to help anyone who wants freedom from it." Lily sighed. "I'm still having problems with the final step though."

Remus felt disappointed. "None of the ideas helped?"

"I need a volunteer to try them on. There's only one problem. If I fail, they may die." Lily wasn't willing to risk anyone's life.

"That will have to wait then." Remus wasn't ready to risk his life either; not until he really had to. "Lily, this won't be easy to hear but Severus needs your help with something else."

Severus then told Lily about Virginia. "I need some of Black's blood, Lily."

Lily didn't even bat an eyelid. "I'll get it for you."

October 14th 1995

Lily apparated home to find Sirius about to leave. "Hello."

"I thought you wouldn't be home on Hogsmeade weekends." Sirius was surprised to see his wife. "And where's Cassie?"

"Minerva said I wasn't needed, and Cassie wanted to stay with a school friend for a sleepover." Lily didn't mention that the friend was Livvy Snape. "So I thought I'd drop home and see you."

Sirius picked up his cloak. "I didn't know; I've got to go to the hospital, Lily."

Lily knew exactly where Sirius was going. "I'll come with you."

Sirius shook his head. "You'll be bored."

"That's okay. It's been a while since I visited any patients." When she had time, Lily often visited patients who had no-one to visit them, taking small gifts and little things to make them feel less alone.

Sirius smiled. "In that case, why don't you just get some bits and pieces together and I'll meet you there."

Lily picked up her own cloak. "That sounds fine. I'll see you shortly."

Sirius apparated to Villa Laurifer to find Harry waiting for him. "Change of plan. I can't stay as Lily wants to spend some time with me. You will, however, keep practicing with Remus as you have been doing. I'll let you know when to be here next."

Harry hid his elation. "Yes, Sir."

Sirius then apparated to the hospital where he ran into a surprised Alice. "What are you doing here?"

Sirius didn't look happy. "I'm supposed to be training Harry but Lily's home and wanted to spend some time with me. I'd already told her that the hospital was short staffed so here I am. She should be here shortly."

"My shift's almost over. Do you want me to deal with Harry for you?" Alice offered.

Sirius shook his head. "I've already dismissed him."

Alice suddenly smiled brightly. "Lily, how lovely to see you."

Lily kissed Alice on the cheek. "Alice. Have you been called in as well? Sirius told me how short-staffed the hospital is at the moment."

Alice covered for Sirius. "I'm actually about to go off duty but I floored Sirius this morning and asked if he'd come in as I've been here all night."

Lily picked up the basket she'd put down to kiss Alice. "In that case, I'd better let the two of you get on. I told Sirius I was going to visit some of the patients."

The three of them then parted, Lily's face looking troubled.

At the end of the day, Sirius looked round for Lily before walking up to his staff nurse. "Nurse Chapel. Have you seen my wife?"

"Sorry. I forgot to tell you. She left about an hour ago." Sarah Chapel smiled brightly at Sirius. "She was wonderful with the little ones today."

Sirius smiled back. "She always is. Goodnight."

Sarah really liked Sirius; he was a good healer as well as an obviously caring family man. "Goodnight, Healer Black."

Sirius apparated home to find Lily in the kitchen. "What are you doing?"

"I've just put dinner on and I was practicing my charms for the seventh year class on Monday." Lily answered as she threw a severing charm towards a large pumpkin she'd placed on the table.

Sirius watched as the spell went slightly astray. "You're not quite aiming properly."

He then took out his own wand and cast the same spell. Lily watched carefully as the pumpkin felt apart neatly through the center. "Reparo."

Lily grinned. "You might want to stand back while I practice."

Sirius moved to the side to watch. Just as Lily cast the spell, she sneezed, her wand flicking sideways towards Sirius. Not expecting it, Sirius didn't move out of the way, and a large gash appeared in his arm. Lily looked aghast. "Oh Merlin, Sirius, I'm so sorry."

Sirius watched as Lily picked up the towel which lay on the side next to her. "It's okay, Lily. It's no more than a scratch."

"I could have severed your arm." Lily went to wrap the towel around Sirius' arm, only for him to pull out his wand and heal the cut.

Sirius held up his arm. "See there was nothing to worry about."

Lily knelt down and mopped up the blood that had dripped onto the floor. "I think I'm going to practice that when no-one else is around."

"I think that might be a good idea." Sirius grinned and sniffed the air. "You might be a fantastic cook but you're a lousy aim."

Lily looked upset. "I said I was sorry."

Sirius pulled her towards him. "Forget it about, Lily. I was only teasing."

Tamping down on her revulsion, Lily kissed Sirius back as he slid his hand into her hair and kissed her, before letting Lily go. He smiled as his stomach rumbled. "So what's for dinner?"

Lily headed towards the oven to get the food out, glad that Sirius hadn't tried to take things further. "Roast lamb."

Sirius' mouth began to water. Even though the house-elves could cook, it never tasted the same as Lily's food. "Great."

Lily watched as Sirius piled up his plate and began eating. Moving over to the side she uncorked the bottle of wine she'd already opened earlier. "Wine?"

Sirius nodded and Lily filled two glasses before carrying them over to the kitchen table. "I wasn't sure whether I should pick red or white so I went with red."

Sirius knew that Lily worried about the right wine choices and took a mouthful. "This is just fine."

Lily started to eat dinner and took a mouthful of water. She watched from under her eyelashes as Sirius' eyes began to close. Ignoring him, she continued to eat dinner. Suddenly Sirius' head made a loud thud as it contacted the table. Getting up, Lily hurried over to the fireplace before flooing Grimmauld Square.

Remus' head appeared in the flames. "Did you get it?"

Lily nodded. "Come through."

Remus stepped through into the kitchen. He spotted Sirius lying with his head on the table. "Nice job."

"I know." She then passed Remus the towel she'd used to mop up Sirius' blood. "You'd better go."

Remus kissed her on the cheek. "I'll see you at school tomorrow."

Lily doused the flames in the fire and hurried back to the table before casting a heating charm on both plates of food, removing the tainted wine, and replacing it with a fresh bottle. She then cast 'enervate' on Sirius. "Sirius, are you alright?"

Sirius rubbed his head. "What happened?"

Lily made her voice tremble. "One minute you were talking about the wine and the next your eyes rolled up into your head and you passed out. I was going to call Alice if I couldn't wake you."

Sirius pulled out his wand and ran a quick diagnostic on himself. "My blood sugar is a little low."

Lily let out a sigh of relief. "For one moment I thought something was seriously wrong. You work too hard."

Sirius picked up his fork. "I think I'd better eat this."

Lily took a large mouthful of wine before continuing with her meal.

After they'd finished, Lily took Sirius by the hand. "I think it's time you got some sleep."

Sirius grinned. "It's not really sleep I want."

Lily shook her head. "You passed out, Sirius, and I know you're the healer, but I'm not taking no for an answer. Now get to bed and get some sleep. I've got school papers to mark."

Sirius went to protest only for Lily to gently push him towards the papers. "I'll be up later."

Lily waited for him to reach the top of the stairs before walking into the study and pouring herself a large brandy. She just hoped that Severus would be able to use the blood she'd gotten for him.

The Next Day

Albus looked up as the fireplace flared to life and his face lit up in a smile. "Alice, what brings you here?"

"I thought I'd drop by and see how you were feeling." Alice kissed her godfather on the cheek. "So Uncle Albus, how are you feeling? You don't look particularly well."

"Just a little tired. My research isn't coming along as well as I'd hoped and it's becoming a little frustrating." Albus steered Alice into his sitting room off his office.

"Why don't we have some tea?" Alice suggested. "You can tell me all about it."

Up until now, Albus hadn't discussed what he'd been researching but he decided that Alice might have some ideas for him. "Let's sit down then."

Alice poured out the tea that the house-elf Albus had called had brought in. "So what is this secret research you've been doing then?"

"Have you ever heard of the Deathly Hallows?" Albus didn't expect her to but asked anyway.

"No. What are they?" Alice sat back with a cup of tea.

"There are three; a ring, a wand and an invisibility cloak." Albus stopped to take a sip from his teacup. "Together they would allow me to master death."

Alice gasped. "You wouldn't need the horcrux if you had them."

Albus shook his head. "No, I wouldn't." He sighed. "Unfortunately I only have two, the ring and the cloak. The wand is, I believe, somewhere in the Ministry."

Alice asked after Dumbledore's contact at the Ministry. "Can't Dolores help?"

"She believes it's hidden somewhere in the Department of Ministries but without being an Unspeakable, she obviously can't gain access to it." Albus was frustrated. "I'm so close. I need the wand to work on the scripts I've found. Once I manage to translate them, the power will be mine."

"If I can help, I will." Alice promised. "I know a few people in the Ministry from being their healer; I'll see what I can find out."

Albus beamed at his goddaughter. "That would be such a help."

"It may take some time, but I'll get back to you on it when I can." Alice then smiled. "So how is Prewett working out for you?"

Albus smirked. "None of the staff like him but he reports diligently to me on what's happening."

"And the pupils?" Alice asked casually.

Albus laughed. "They hate him. He's sticking to the Ministry guidelines about what should be taught. I think they're finding it a little frustrating only being allowed to learn from books, and not being allowed to translate it into practice."

Alice knew her Master would be interested to hear that. "Don't you think it might be a little difficult for them to pass their exams without a practical grounding?"

Albus shrugged. "I don't care either way. By the time the end of the school year arrives, I hope to have obtained all of the Hallows by then. I won't need the extra power and security Hogwarts provides me with now."

"The school can't help with your aging though." Alice looked concerned. "You really should take it easy; the horcrux will only sustain for you so long."

"I can't. I've got to keep trying to find the final part of the Hallows. I need them to make me feel better, as right now I feel old, tired and stretched." Albus glanced worriedly over at Alice. "You do still have it safe, don't you?"

"It never leaves my side." Alice pulled out the silver locket that she always wore.

Albus relaxed. "You're a good girl, Alice. Your mother would be so proud of you."

"I know." Alice still missed her mother, even now. "I think you should try to get some sleep this afternoon, Uncle Albus. I'll send over some nutrient potions for you."

Albus shook his head. "I don't really like them."

"I don't really care." Alice admonished him. "You'll feel better for taking them." She then got up. "I'll see you next month, and remember to try and take it easy."

Albus saw Alice to the floo before hugging her. "I'll see you then unless you have any information for me."

"Bye Uncle Albus." Alice stepped into the fireplace and disappeared.

After stepping out at the other side, she hurried to her room and picked up her mask before apparating out to Villa Laurifer. She had news for her Master.

In Albus' sitting room, Frances left the portrait she'd been hiding in the background of and hurried off to find Remus.

Next Chapter: Severus learns Hermione's father's true identity; A Skirmish at Hogsmeade; A Frightening Night for Lily.

Chapter 56: Disclosure

Warning: Character Death!

The Dudley/Luna scene is especially for a good friend who asked for it. You know who you are!

Remus walked into Hogwarts and straight down to Severus' rooms. Knocking, he soon found himself face to face with Severus. "I've got it."

Virginie smiled at Remus. "Hello."

Remus pulled Virginie into a hug. "You're looking well."

Virginie smiled. "I feel it."

Severus interrupted, anxious to get started on the experiment. "I'm sorry, Virginie, but Remus and I have something we need to get done."

Remus followed Severus into his potions room. "How long does the test take?"

"I've already got a base for it, so it will be ready by tomorrow lunchtime." Severus took the towel. "It will take me some time to extract the blood from this but if you want to come back tomorrow and watch the test, I'd appreciate it."

Remus left promising to return the next day.

Next afternoon

"Right, we're ready to start this." Severus hated the nervousness that pervaded his voice.

"Are you sure you want me to stay?" Remus asked.

Severus nodded. "Yes. I might need you to calm me down."

Remus fell silent as he watched Severus heat up the potion base before picking up the blood extracted from the towel, and dropping it in the cauldron. He then took another vial of blood which he also added. At Remus' quizzical look he told him. "It's Hermione's."

Both men waited anxiously as the potion simmered away. After a few minutes, Severus carefully lifted the cauldron off the heat, and poured the potion from it into a container. Remus still didn't know what was happening. "What happens now?"

"If it turns green, then we'll know that Black fathered her." Severus told him. "As I'm almost sure he's the other culprit, if it turns blue, then it's Malfoy. Basically it's a simple paternity test."

Remus frowned. "I didn't think you had to boil the blood to get a result."

"For a normal paternity test you wouldn't, but as I've adopted Hermione as well as making her my blood heir, I needed to get rid of any impurities in the blood." Severus explained.

"By impurities, I take it you mean any traces of your paternity?" Remus asked.

Severus nodded. "We should get a result any moment now."

The potion changed color.

Virginie was playing with Dominic when the two men returned. "Did you get your experiment finished?"

Remus nodded. "We did." He then turned to Severus. "We've actually got another problem."

Virginie picked up her son. "Nap time."

Severus waited for her to close the door before asking. "Go on. What is it?"

“Dumbledore is after something called the Deathly Hallows.” Remus then filled Severus in on Albus’ conversation with Alice.

“And who is this mystery visitor Dumbledore had?” Severus enquired.

“I can’t tell you.” Remus couldn’t take the risk of hinting at Alice’s identity, as Severus had seen the memory where Voldemort revealed Lamia was Dumbledore’s closest confidante. “Frances can though. We can go to my rooms now.”

When they got to Remus’ rooms, they found Harry and Lily waiting for them. “Lily what are you doing back? I thought you wouldn’t be back until this evening.”

“Sirius went into the hospital again after lunch, so I decided to come home.” Lily snorted. “Well at least he said it was the hospital.”

Harry looked worried. “Dad, Maman has something to tell you.”

Remus sat down. “What is it?”

“I pushed Sirius into letting me attend the hospital with him yesterday morning. When I arrived, he was with Alice Longbottom. Remus, she said that she’d floored Sirius and asked him to come in. Normally I would have just taken her comment at face value, except for this time I was sure that Sirius was supposed to be apparating to Villa Laurifer, and not the hospital.” Lily stopped to take a breath. “When I spoke to Harry just now, he confirmed that Sirius had apparated to Villa Laurifer and told him that I’d turned up and wanted to spend time with him. Remus, I think Alice was covering for him.”

Severus agreed. “So she knows what he is, he’s having an affair with her, or she’s a Death Eater as well.”

Despite everything that had gone on, Lily felt queasy at the thought of Alice and Sirius together. “That’s what I thought.”

Unable to confirm or deny their suppositions, Remus just shrugged. “We have no way of knowing, or she could have genuinely floored

Sirius and you turned up. If she had, he'd have had to cancel Harry anyway."

Lily's face fell. "I didn't think of that."

Severus turned to face the reason he'd come up to Remus' rooms. "Frances, can I ask you something?"

Frances winked at Severus. "You can ask me anything you like."

Everyone by now had grown used to Frances' flirtatious ways and tended to ignore them. Severus simply smiled. "Who was Dumbledore's guest for tea yesterday?"

Even though she didn't understand why Remus couldn't have told him, Frances knew that her friend must have good reason not to have told Severus himself. "It was Alice Longbottom."

Severus frowned. "How often does Alice visit Dumbledore?"

"At least once a month." Frances told him. "She's his goddaughter."

Suddenly understanding dawned on Severus' face. "She's Dumbledore's closest confidante, isn't she?"

Thinking Severus was talking to her, Frances nodded. "I'd say that term fits her pretty well."

Severus sat down. "The Dark Lord told Jamie that Lamia was Dumbledore's closest confidante. Alice Longbottom has to be Lamia."

Lily scowled. "That bitch. No wonder she was covering for Sirius."

"What about Nev and his sister?" Harry's first thought was for his friends.

"I don't think we should tell them right now." Lily told him. "Jamie's still having trouble coping around Sirius. Neville adores his mother; I don't think he'd be able to cope. Jamie at least has me. Neville would have no-one to turn to. You can only imagine how Augusta would take it."

Harry shuddered at the thought of the matriarch. "I know that but don't you think its best they find out from us rather than some other way?"

"I promise to tell Neville at some point, but not right now, Harry." Lily looked over at Severus. "Was it positive?"

Remus looked pointedly at Harry. "We'll tell you later."

Harry scowled; he hated being kept out of the loop. "Was what positive?"

Severus sighed. "I may as well tell him, Remus. If I ever decide to tell Hermione, she'll need Harry's support. Has Hermione told you about her mother being engaged to Voldemort?"

Harry confirmed she had. "Quite some time ago."

"When Virginie refused to marry him, Voldemort had four of his men rape Virginie." Severus felt himself growing angry again at the thought of it.

Harry felt his heart go out to Hermione's mother and squeezed his professor's arm. "I'm sorry, Severus."

Severus patted Harry's hand. "Thank you, Harry. But there's more. The four men were all lieutenants at the time; Barty Crouch Junior who died in Azkaban; Dominic Rosier who's also dead now; I suspect Lucius Malfoy and I'm totally sure of the last one; Sirius Black."

Harry knew that Sirius had done some pretty awful things, but he'd never have pegged him as someone who'd stoop so low as to force himself on a woman. He looked over at Lily. "I'm sorry, Maman."

Lily shrugged. "I'm okay. It's not as if he did it to me."

Harry couldn't believe that Lily was so unconcerned about her husband being accused of rape. He decided to focus his thoughts on

Voldemort's victims. "Is there anything I can do for Hermione or Virginie?"

Severus felt warmed by Harry's concern for his family. "Nothing except be there for Hermione if she needs you."

"Who is he?" Harry didn't bother pressing for other details.

Severus told him. Harry got up. "Thanks for telling me. If you ever decide to tell Hermione, I'll be there for her." Harry then went into his room and collected his things before leaving.

Severus shared a brief look with Remus before standing up. "I'm going to head back down to my rooms."

When the door closed, Remus turned to Lily. "Lily, you're turning into a robot. The Lily I know would have at least shown sort of emotion when Harry sympathized with you. You can't keep going on like this."

Lily let Remus' words wash over her. "I've got to go, Remus. Cassie needs collecting from Slytherin."

Not knowing what else to do, Remus let her go.

14th October 1995

Everyone filed out of the Room until finally only Hermione, Harry, Dudley and Luna were left. Harry had been hoping for some time with Hermione but Dudley had pulled him aside and asked if he wouldn't mind letting him and Luna have a little time together.

Harry walked towards the door. "I'll see you all later then."

Disappointed that Harry didn't seem to want to stay, Hermione gave him a few minutes headstart until she too left the room.

Once they'd both gone, Luna turned to Dudley. "What do you want to talk about?"

Dudley didn't touch Luna. "I'm not sure how you really feel about me, Luna."

"What do you mean?" Luna thought that Dudley knew how she felt.

"Every time Harry is upset or down, you're always hugging him. He never seems that anxious to let you go either." Dudley knew he sounded agitated. "I know you liked Harry before me. It seems almost as if you still do, Luna."

Luna hadn't realized that her comforting Harry had had such a profound effect on Dudley. "Do you really think I'd be going out with you if I liked Harry?"

"I honestly don't know." Dudley admitted.

Luna could see that Dudley was insecure about her affections. "Dudley, Harry needs all the love he can get right now. He's going through a tough time."

"You love Harry, don't you?" Dudley asked quietly.

Luna nodded. "Of course I do."

Dudley got up. "I'll not stand in your way then."

Luna knew that Dudley had got the wrong impression. "Dudley, I love him like I love Kai or Scarlett or Auri."

Dudley didn't move. "How about me, Luna? How do you feel about me?"

"Sit down." Luna patted the sofa beside her.

Dudley reluctantly sat down. Luna promptly shifted to sit on his lap. "Dudley, I love you more than anyone else, and I'd do anything for you."

Dudley wrapped his arms around Luna and pulled her head down onto his chest. "I'm sorry. I just thought you preferred Harry."

"Dudley, no-one else knows me like you do." Luna snuggled closer to her boyfriend. "Who else would come searching for Crumple-Horned Snorkacks at five in the morning with me, or make daisy chains and leave them on my pillow?"

Dudley felt a little uncomfortable at being reminded of his very unmanly gesture. "I'd do anything for you, Luna."

Luna lifted her head and kissed Dudley. Silence reigned as Dudley kissed her back.

18th November 1995

Sirius stood watching as one of his men came out of the Three Broomsticks dragging Rosmerta by the hair behind him, before throwing her down on the ground in front of Sirius. "Pledge to serve my Master and I'll spare your life."

Rosmerta spat at Sirius' feet. "You and your so-called Master can go swing."

Sirius pointed his wand at her. "Avada Kedavra." He then turned to the other shopkeepers who had been dragged out of their stores and were now kneeling on the ground. "Let this be a lesson to all of you. I suggest you co-operate unless you wish to meet the same fate as Rosmerta here."

Sirius then stalked towards the pub where he could hear spells being fired off from inside.

Lily felt her stomach go over as the door flew open to reveal a masked man she recognized only too well. Sirius snapped out his orders. "Kill anyone who resists."

Lily had no intention of yielding to him or anyone else, and moved to shield a group of third years who were crying in fright. "Reducto."

The spell missed Sirius by inches and he swung round to find himself face to face with his wife. Swearing under his breath he raised his wand at her. "Stupefy."

Lily dispelled the spell effortlessly. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see the some of the older students, including Luna and Dudley driving the Death Eaters back towards Sirius.

Ducking as a reducto spell flew over her head, Lily tipped over a table and pushed the children behind it. Not one to cower in a corner, Lily took aim at Sirius again. "Flagrate."

Sirius easily batted the spell away and returned fire. "Serpensortia."

Lily yelled as a large cobra sprang up in front of her. Hermione swung round from defending Harry's sisters, and hissed quickly at the snake. "Leave her alone or die."

The snake immediately backed down, giving Lily time to vanish it. Now seriously pissed at Sirius, Lily decided to use a technique she'd perfected while working at the Ministry which allowed her to encompass three spells into one. The only downside of it was, was that it tended to use up a lot of energy. As Sirius sent a stunning spell at her again, Lily returned fire with the threefold spell.

Unable to determine what the spell was, Sirius threw up an umbrella shield which dissipated the first two spells. Normally he would have used a reflective shield but he didn't want to hurt Lily.

Sirius knew his decision not to use the reflective shield was a bad one, when the third spell shattered the umbrella shield, leaving Sirius open to a spell which Lily had learnt from Severus. Not wanting to let Sirius know what it was Lily quietly uttered 'Sectumsempra'.

Sirius gasped as a large slash opened from his groin to his shoulder and blood began to gush out at a rapid rate. "Everyone pull out." As a healer, Sirius knew that he had little time and quickly apparated directly to where he knew Alice would be waiting. "Help."

Alice ran her wand over him. "I've never seen this spell before." After several agonizing minutes, she finally managed to stop the bleeding. "You might want to try using Dittany on it to stop it scarring."

Sirius was saved the trouble of making a scathing remark when Voldemort walked over. "Who managed to do this to you?"

Sirius laughed bitterly. "My wife."

"She's your Achilles' heel, Sirius." Voldemort knew that Lily was Sirius' blind spot. "If she gets in the way again, kill her."

Sirius nodded. "Yes, my Lord." Sirius knew that the only reason Voldemort hadn't ordered her execution now was because he knew how Sirius felt about her.

Alice waited until Voldemort left the room. "You do know if you were anyone else, you'd have been screaming for mercy right now."

"I'm well aware of that." Sirius snapped.

"Will you be able to do it?" Alice had a feeling that Sirius wouldn't.

Sirius nodded. "Of course. I killed my brother didn't I?"

"But your brother wasn't the mother of your children." Alice pointed out. "If you can't, then I'll do it for you."

"No thank you." Sirius refused. "And let me warn you now, Alice. If anyone lays a finger on Lily except for me, then I will kill them, even you."

Alice wasn't surprised by Sirius' response. "She's all yours. I won't touch her but without telling the others who you are, you can't expect them to do the same."

"I know." Sirius sat up, wincing as he did. "But if you intimate or even give the vaguest hint that our Master considers she's a problem, I'll kill you for that instead."

Alice knew that Sirius wasn't messing with her. "I know better than that." She turned as the door opened and Bella flew in. "Our Master said you were hurt."

Sirius put an arm around his cousin. "Calm down, Bella. I'm fine. Alice fixed me up." Sirius led Bella over to a chair. "Sit down and relax. It's not good for the baby if you get worked up like this."

Bella took a deep breath and laid a hand over her stomach. "Sorry, but I was so frightened when he told me." She sat down. "Has everyone else come back alright?"

Sirius didn't know. "I've no idea. I apparated straight back here."

"I'll go check." Alice left the room.

Bella looked more closely at the cut on Sirius' chest. "You should try White Dittany on that. It's prevented my stomach from scarring."

Instead of snapping at Bella, as he was going to do with Alice, Sirius immediately called for a house-elf who brought him the requisite extract he needed. Almost immediately he noticed a lessening of the redness. "Thanks Bella."

"Who did this to you?"

"Lily." Sirius had been more than a little shocked at Lily's expertise. "Our Master has ordered me to kill her if she gets in the way again."

"Why don't you just tell her who you are?" Bella thought that Sirius was silly keeping his identity hidden from his wife.

"Because she's already sworn to kill me for taking Harry as my protégé." Sirius informed her. "Somehow I don't think going home and telling her I'm Amicus is going to go down very well."

"Why don't you just try?" Bella suggested. "You can always obliviate her afterwards if she reacts negatively."

Sirius pondered Bella's suggestion, before shaking his head. "I don't think so, Bella."

"It was just a suggestion." Bella winced as the baby kicked. "It might be better than having to kill her. Because if she gets in the way again, our Lord won't let you leave her alive."

Sirius realized that Bella had a point. "I'll think about it."

Bella got up. "I'm glad you're okay, Siri. I need to see if Lucius got back alright."

Sirius stopped Bella from leaving. "You do know he'll never leave his wife for you, don't you?"

Bella's face dropped. "His wife is little more than a whore."

Sirius shook his head. "Don't let our Master hear you say that."

"I can't believe he's sleeping with her." Bella felt disgusted.

"Every man has needs, Bella. Our Master included." Sirius kissed his cousin on her forehead. "Now run along and don't forget to take things easy."

One Week Later

Lily apparated home to find Sirius waiting for her. "Sirius, I didn't expect to find you home yet."

"Daddy." Cassie broke away from her mother to jump into her father's arms. "Mum said that you wouldn't be here."

"And not see two of my favorite ladies?" Sirius swung Cassie round before putting her down. "You're getting heavier every time I see you."

Cassie scowled. "You're supposed to say taller, Daddy."

“Whoops.” Sirius ruffled her hair playfully. “I’ve arranged for you to spend the weekend with Scarlett and Aunt Nia, if that’s alright with you.”

Cassie’s face lit up even more. “Yes! I can see Kai.” Sirius held out his arm. “Hold tight.” He looked over his shoulder at Lily. “I’ll be back in a moment. There’s some wine in the sitting room.”

Lily wished she’d found some excuse not to return home. The thought of spending time alone with Sirius made her feel sick. Walking into the sitting room she found a very expensive bottle of white wine chilling on ice, together with her favorite chocolates sitting on a silver platter. She wondered what Sirius wanted to talk about.

A few moments later, Sirius apparated into the sitting room making Lily jump. “Sorry.”

Lily smiled briefly before picking up her wine glass and taking a large mouthful. “So what did you want to talk to me about?”

“Sit down.” Sirius didn’t quite know how to tell her. “Lily, there’s something I need to tell you but I don’t know how to put it.”

Lily hoped he was going to tell her he was leaving her. “You want a separation?”

Sirius immediately dropped to his knees and took her hand in his. “No, of course not. Whatever gave you that idea?”

Lily resisted the temptation to pull away from Sirius. “Well you seemed to be having trouble putting what it is you want to say into words, so I just assumed it was something of that nature.”

“Lily, there’s no easy way to say this but, I…” Sirius’ voice trailed off. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

Lily knocked back the entire glass of wine and got up to refill it.

Sirius came back down with one hand behind his back.

Lily tried to look around him. "What have you got there?"

Sirius pulled the mask from behind his back. "This belongs to me, Lily."

Lily hadn't been expecting Sirius to confess and was completely stunned. "I don't know what to say, Sirius."

Sirius felt encouraged by the fact that Lily hadn't burst into tears or tried to assault him. "I didn't want to tell you who I was but I had to."

"Why?" Lily put down the glass of wine. Even though she already knew that Sirius was Amicus, hearing him confess it to her, brought the truth home with sharp and painful clarity.

"When you attacked me at Hogsmeade, I apparated back to the Dark Lord's home." Sirius moved closer Lily. "He's told me that I'm to eliminate you if you get in my way again."

Lily stepped backwards. "And would you, Sirius?" Lily's face was cold and unyielding. "Would you kill me?"

Sirius shook his head. "I can't."

"Why ever not?" Lily snapped. "You've threatened to do the same to my son and his family."

"Harry isn't you." Sirius protested.

"Neither are my other children." Lily could feel her temper rising. "What about them?"

"I'd never harm my children. I'd rather die first." Sirius knew he had no right to get upset at Lily but he couldn't help feeling dismayed that Lily would think he could ever hurt them.

Lily hated Sirius but she was taken aback by the sincerity of his plea. "So what do you expect me to say now that you've told me you're Amicus, Sirius. That I forgive you for what you've done to my son? Well guess what, I don't."

Sirius had anticipated Lily being angry. "I didn't expect you to." Sirius got up. "The Dark Lord will win, Lily and when he does, Harry will be among the elite, Lily. Don't you want a better life for him?"

"A better life? How can you claim it's a better life? You've tortured him, Sirius. You've made him take another life." Lily backed up again when Sirius went to move closer to her once more.

"He had to, Lily. It's a trial we all have to go through. I couldn't make an exception for Harry." Sirius defended his actions.

"And where will I stand in this brave new world of yours, Sirius?" Lily snapped. "I'm a Mudblood. Isn't that what your precious master stands against?"

"Lily, you'd be safe. You're my wife." Sirius wished Lily would calm down.

"I'd be laughed at, Sirius, and you know it." Lily bit out.

Sirius' face became angry. "No-one will dare mock you."

"What are you going to do, Sirius? Murder everyone who disparages me?" Lily sneered.

"If I have to." Sirius admitted.

Lily shook her head. "You can't really believe that I'd be alright with this."

"I told Bella you wouldn't be." Sirius wished he never listened to her.

"What did you expect?" Lily paced as she spoke. "That I'd say, it's fine and I don't mind?"

"I didn't know what you'd say, Lily." Sirius sighed heavily. "Lily, please be reasonable."

Lily lifted her head to look Sirius in the eye. "And if I'm not, Sirius, what then?"

Sirius' face became cold and closed. "I'd rather you were."

Lily suddenly felt frightened as she realized she was all alone with Sirius. Thinking quickly, she decided to become placatory. "Sirius, you can't just expect to drop this on me and for me to suddenly be okay with it. I need some time."

Sirius let out the breath he'd been holding. "How much time?"

"I don't know right now." Lily picked up her wine glass, trying to hide her shaking hands. She then stepped aside to allow Sirius to pour out some wine for himself. "I think I need to sit down."

Sirius watched as Lily sat on the sofa. He'd half-expected her to take the chair. Deciding to give her a little space, he sat down on the opposite side of the room. "Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

There was a lot but Lily knew that asking inflammatory questions would only be asking for trouble. "Let's say Voldemort wins as you say he will." Lily hid her slight smile at Sirius' wince when she called his Master by his given name. "I wouldn't be expected to become a Death Eater would I?"

Sirius shook his head. "No. I know you're not capable of killing someone."

"And my children?" Lily couldn't bear the thought of her children being forced into servitude.

Sirius decided to be truthful. "Orion would be expected to join my Master but it would be entirely up to the girls."

Lily shuddered. "I'm not going to have any say about Orion am I, even if I disagree?"

Sirius confirmed her question. "You're not. If I hadn't have chosen Harry, then Orion would have become my protégé."

Lily took a mouthful of wine. "What would you expect of me?"

"To keep my identity secret." Sirius couldn't afford to have his alter ego revealed.

"I could do that." Lily tried to keep calm as she took yet another mouthful of wine. "Who else knows who you are?"

"The Dark Lord, Bella, and Harry." Sirius couldn't tell her about Alice as even he was bound by an oath of secrecy.

"So I'd be amongst the honored few then?" Lily kept her tone light.

Sirius smiled as he realized that Lily was beginning to accept what he'd told her. "You would." Sirius suddenly stood up. "Come here."

Lily felt her heart begin to race in fear. "I thought you said you'd give me some time."

"I'm not going to hurt you." Sirius hated the scared look his wife wore. "I want to show you something. Fetch your hooded cloak."

Not really having much choice, Lily left the room and returned with the requested item. "I've got it."

Sirius lifted his own mask from the table to reveal a plain white one underneath it. "You'll need to put that and the cloak on."

Lily couldn't bring herself to touch it. "I thought you said that I wouldn't have to..."

Sirius interrupted her. "I'm not taking you to be initiated, Lily. I simply don't want anyone to know who you are. Now please, put it on for me."

Feeling that Sirius' words were more of an order than a request, Lily did as he asked. She was surprised to find that contrary to the cold hard look of it, the mask was actually soft inside.

Sirius slipped on his own mask, before sliding his arm around Lily's waist and apparating them both to Villa Laurifer.

Next Chapter: Lily's night gets worse; Dumbledore suffers a blow; Jamie gets a new girlfriend; Harry discovers what's in the sphere from his dreams.

Chapter 57: All About Lily

Sirius turned to Lily. "Say nothing and simply follow me. Believe me; no-one should bother you."

Lily nodded and took a deep breath as Sirius pushed open the double doors to reveal a large room where quite a few Death Eaters were either seated at tables or just milling around. She guessed that this must be the ballroom that Harry had described to her. She had refused to watch Harry's memory of his introduction to the other Death Eaters.

Sirius strode confidently across the ballroom, Lily trailing a little behind. She heard one of the Death Eaters laughing about Amicus finally getting himself a piece of ass. Unprepared, she almost ran into Sirius as he ground to a halt, before spinning round and making his way over to the man who'd made the comment. "Are you really so stupid that you thought that I wouldn't hear or do anything about it?"

The man, a fairly new recruit, swallowed hard. "I'm sorry, Amicus."

"Crucio." Sirius made it short because of Lily. He looked over to where some of the other men were standing watching. "Take him away. I'll finish with him later."

Sirius then strode back to where Lily was standing waiting. "Let's go."

Now more frightened than ever of her husband, Lily could feel herself shaking as she followed Sirius up several flights of stairs and along a corridor before reaching a set of ornate double doors. Sirius pushed them open. "Go in."

Lily did as she was told, jumping when Sirius closed the doors with a sharp bang. "Where are we?"

"You can take off the mask now." Sirius, however, didn't remove his own. "These are Harry's rooms."

Not having seen Harry's memories of his interactions with Sirius, Lily gasped as she walked around the apartment. "This is amazing."

"Would you like to see mine?" Sirius asked quietly.

Not really knowing what else to say, Lily agreed. "I would."

"Mask." Sirius nodded towards the table where Lily had placed it.

Lily replaced it and followed Sirius back out and down the corridor. She wasn't surprised to find that his rooms were almost as luxurious as Harry's. "Can I remove my mask again?" Lily wanted it gone.

Sirius removed his own mask. "Go ahead."

Lily took off the mask and wandered into the various rooms. "Why is Harry's apartment bigger?"

"He's taken the rooms meant for the Dark Lord's heir." Sirius put an arm around Lily. "I told you Harry was important."

A knock at the door startled both of them. Sirius replaced his mask before indicating that Lily should do the same. Opening the door, Sirius bowed low. "My Lord."

Lily gripped the table she was leaning against when she realized that Voldemort had just walked into the room, followed by a tall man she suspected might be Remus.

Voldemort approached Lily. "So who do we have here, Amicus?"

Sirius closed the door. "You can take off your mask."

Lily shakily removed it. She could see that Voldemort wasn't surprised to discover her identity. "So you finally told her?"

"Yes, my Lord." Sirius walked over to Lily.

Voldemort leant casually against the back of the nearest leather sofa. "And she's agreed to keep your secret?"

Realizing that she might be able to find out things about Voldemort and his plans that Remus couldn't, Lily made a snap decision and answered in Sirius' stead. "I have." Lily felt Sirius start slightly.

"Good." Voldemort turned to the man standing silently behind him. "You may take off your mask, Praeses."

As soon as Remus revealed his face, Lily gasped. "Remus, what are you doing here?"

"What do you think I'm doing here?" Remus responded smoothly.

Lily didn't respond.

Voldemort didn't bother to hide his amusement. "So, Lady Black, what do you think of your son's living quarters?"

Lily wasn't surprised that Voldemort appeared to know she'd been in the apartment. "I was astounded to find such opulent rooms had been appointed to someone who is barely fifteen and only a novice."

"I wouldn't exactly call Harry a novice. He's proved himself to be more than able to deal with anything a fully fledged Death Eater could." Voldemort's next words surprised Lily. "And you my dear seem to be almost as capable as your son. No-one has ever managed to injure Amicus so seriously before."

Lily decided she'd do better to stand up to Voldemort, rather than cowering in fear. "And no-one's ever threatened me with a snake before; I was angry."

"I've seen Amicus' memory of the attack. That's a very interesting spell you used to break through his defenses." Voldemort looked Lily squarely in the eye. "Would you care to share?"

Lily lied. "I can barely remember what I did. I was simply angry and attacked him."

"Pity." Voldemort appeared to take her at her word. "I hope to see you again, my dear."

Lily bit back her revulsion and lied. "Likewise."

Voldemort turned to Sirius. "Before I do see her again, I expect you to teach Lady Black some manners."

Sirius inclined his head. "My Lord."

Lily said nothing and watched as Remus replaced his mask before following Voldemort out. Lily then span round to face Sirius. "Take me home."

"Put on your mask then." Sirius walked out of his room, leaving Lily to follow him. No-one said anything as the pair of them walked across the ballroom. Once they'd reached the apparition point, Sirius slid his arm around Lily's waist feeling her stiffen up against him. Sighing, he apparated them both into the sitting room of their home, and waited for the explosion.

Forgetting how frightened she'd been of him earlier, Lily ripped off the mask. "You son of a bitch. You knew that Remus was a Death Eater all along and you said nothing to me. I comforted his ass when he sat there all miserable over my son, and all the time you both bloody well knew what was going on."

Sirius wished that Voldemort hadn't brought Remus in. "Lily, I'm sorry. I couldn't tell you."

Lily wasn't finished. "Did Voldemort know you were going to take me there?"

Sirius nodded. "I had to get his permission first."

"And you didn't think that I might have liked a little warning he'd be there?" Lily spat out.

"I don't know the Dark Lord would be there." Sirius responded. "Nor did I know that he was going to bring Remus with him."

Lily picked up the wine glass she'd been drinking from earlier and threw it at Sirius who ducked. "Liar."

Sirius walked over and grabbed Lily's wrists. "Just bloody stop it. You're unhurt aren't you? It's not as if he asked you join him."

"Good, because I would rather have died than do that." Lily pulled free of Sirius. "You can all go to hell; you, Remus and your bloody Master."

Sirius let her go. Lily headed for the bedroom and shut the door before collapsing shaking on the bed. She just hoped that Sirius had believed that she wasn't already aware that Remus was a Death Eater.

Realizing that he wasn't likely to get a good reception if he went to bed, Sirius put the house in lockdown, before apparating back to Villa Laurifer; this time directly into his rooms to find Voldemort waiting for him. "I had a feeling you'd be back."

"My Lord." Sirius bowed politely before removing his mask.

"I take it Lily wasn't too pleased to discover Harry's father is a Death Eater." Voldemort helped himself to a large brandy before passing Sirius a glass of firewhiskey.

Sirius gratefully took it. "She blew her top and threw a wine glass at me. Not that I'm surprised, mind you."

"Do you really think she'll keep quiet?" Voldemort asked.

Sirius nodded. "She'd never have contemplated coming here with me tonight if she had no intention of keeping my secret. Anyway, I'll get her to swear an oath before she leaves to go back to Hogwarts. She's not going anywhere tonight as I've put the house in lockdown."

"You do know she was lying when she said she couldn't remember what she attacked you with, don't you?" Voldemort had known very well that it was a threefold spell, having enquired with his Ministry contact after seeing Sirius' memory.

Sirius reluctantly nodded. "If, as you said, she developed the spell for the Ministry, then there's no way she would divulge it to anyone. She never used to discuss her work with me."

Voldemort had a proposition. "I want your wife to work for me. Maxwell's good but he's nowhere near as talented as your wife. In fact, judging from some of the work I know she's done for the Ministry, she's even better than I am."

Sirius was surprised by his Master's admission, and decided to be equally candid. "I doubt she'll take the Dark Mark."

"I'll make an exception in her case then." Voldemort wanted Lily's expertise more than he cared about her taking the Dark Mark. "I can't place it on an unwilling subject anyway."

"I'll talk to her about it." Sirius took a mouthful of firewhiskey. "After today, do you think I should tell Remus who I am?"

"I do, which is why I requested he come here today." Voldemort informed him.

Sirius stood up. "Is he still around?"

Voldemort nodded. "He's in his rooms on the second floor."

Sirius frowned. "Hasn't he moved yet?"

"He said that he doesn't spend enough time here for it to matter." Voldemort got up as well. "I'm going that way myself. I'll send him up."

Sirius didn't need a crystal ball to work out who Voldemort was going to see. "Say hi to Petra for me."

Voldemort grinned. "I'm sure she'd love to say hi to you herself."

Sirius shuddered. "I think I'll pass."

Voldemort just laughed. "Goodnight."

Sirius bowed. "Goodnight my Lord." He then refilled his own glass before pouring out a glass of scotch.

A knock at the door a few minutes later signaled Remus' arrival. "Come in."

Remus pushed open the door and walked in, only to stop in surprise. "What's going on?"

Sirius passed over the scotch. "Sit down and take off your mask."

Remus pulled off his mask before reluctantly sinking into the closest leather sofa. "I can't say that this isn't a shock, because it is."

"I wish I could have told you sooner." Sirius apologized.

"From Lily's appearance here tonight, I can only presume you've told her as well." Remus knew that he must have.

Sirius nodded. "I had to. I couldn't afford for her to injure me again."

Remus then asked the same question Voldemort had. "Do you really think she'll keep your secret, and mine for that matter?"

"I'm going to make sure she does." Sirius informed him. Seeing Remus frown, he disabused him his incorrect impression. "I've put the house in lockdown. She'll have to swear an oath before she leaves. If she doesn't, then I'll simply obliviate her."

Remus relaxed. "I'm not keen on my identity getting out, but I don't want to see Lily hurt either."

"Neither do I; which is why I told her about me. Our Master said if she got in the way again, I was to eliminate her." Sirius took a mouthful of the firewhiskey.

"Now that she knows who we are, will she have to take the Mark?" Remus asked casually.

"No." Sirius smiled. "But the good news is that our Master wishes for her to work for him. I think her display at Hogsmeade impressed him."

"How did Lily take it?" Remus knew that Lily would likely have refused.

"I haven't broached it with her yet." Sirius knew that an angry Lily wasn't the best person to approach. "I thought I'd give her some time to get used to the idea of me, first."

Remus thought it a good idea as well. "I take it you're not going home tonight."

"When I left her, she'd just thrown a wine glass at me and told me I could go to hell." Sirius lifted an eyebrow. "Would you be going back?"

Remus laughed. "With Lily in high dudgeon? Absolutely not!"

Sirius leant back into the sofa. "Lily aside, how do you really feel about Harry being my protégé?"

Remus shrugged. "I was upset at first. No-one likes the idea of their child having to make a first kill."

"I was hoping that might have been your problem." Sirius felt relieved that Remus didn't hold it against him.

Remus quashed the need to get up and rip Sirius apart to show him how much of a problem he really had with him, but instead decided to pander to Sirius' ego. "After I thought it through, I realized what an honor you'd given him."

Sirius was glad that Remus saw it his way. "He deserves it. He's good and by the time he's finished, he'll be almost as good as I am."

Remus hid his amusement at Sirius' opinion of himself; after all Lily had almost managed to kill him. "I think there's a little way to go yet."

Sirius was aware of that."I know, but his dueling has improved beyond recognition since I started instructing him."

Remus grimaced. "I'm well aware of that. He's going to be beating me at dueling if he carries on at the rate he is."

Sirius laughed. "A little competition never hurt anyone."

Remus stood up. "I don't mean to cut and run but I'm supposed to meeting Jamie at ten for some practice."

Sirius walked Remus to the door. "How's he doing?"

"Good." Remus lied; Jamie hated every moment he had to practice. "He'll never be in Harry's class but he can certainly cast a mean Imperius."

Sirius shook hands with his friend. "If I don't see you before, I'll see you at Christmas."

Remus slipped on his mask. "Amicus."

Sirius inclined his head. "Praeses."

Remus closed the door behind him and stalked towards the apparition point. Knowing Sirius' house was in lockdown, he knew he couldn't go there as much as he wanted to check on Lily. He'd have to wait it out until Lily returned to Hogwarts on Sunday night.

Saturday morning

Lily got up and hurriedly began to pack, only to jump when a crack signaled Sirius' arrival home. "Sirius, you frightened me."

Sirius wasn't pleased to find Lily packing. "Where are you going? You're not due back at Hogwarts until tomorrow."

Lily knew she couldn't stay. "I said yesterday, I'd keep your secret, and I will. However, I also said I needed some time, and that's what I'm taking."

Sirius didn't want to push Lily too hard. "Okay, how much time?"

"I'll be home at Christmas." Lily couldn't face coming back before then.

"But that's almost a month away." Sirius protested.

Lily continued packing. "I know how long it is, Sirius. If you don't want to give me the time, then go ahead, do whatever it is you're going to do to me, and be done with it."

Sirius went to slip an arm around Lily only for her to recoil. "Lily, please don't be like this."

"Then give me some time, Sirius." Lily closed her bag.

Knowing he wasn't going to get anywhere by agitating her, Sirius stepped back. "Okay. I'll see you at Christmas but will you send Cassie home before then? I'd like to see my daughter."

Lily shook her head. "She's staying with me."

"You really don't trust me not to hurt her do you?" Sirius pulled out his wand making Lily stiffen. "I swear on my magic that I will never knowingly harm a child of mine."

Lily let out a deep breath. "Fine, she can come home in two weeks time if she wants to. But I'm not going to force her to visit if she wants to stay at Hogwarts."

"Thank you." Sirius picked up Lily's bag. "Let me walk you to the floo. I take it you're going to get Cassie now."

Lily held out her hand for the bag. "She's fine at Nia's; I'll pick her up tomorrow night."

Sirius kept a firm grip on the bag. "I need you to do something for me before you leave."

Guessing what he wanted, Lily pulled out her wand wishing she had the nerve to kill in cold blood. "I swear to keep your identity as Amicus a secret. Satisfied?"

Sirius shook his head. "Sorry Lily, but I can't have you attacking me again. Unlike Harry, I'm not going to ask you to swear allegiance to me." Sirius winced as a look of repugnance crossed Lily's face. "But I do need for you to swear never to take up arms against me or attack me without my invitation to do so. I also need you to swear to keep Remus' identity a secret as well."

Lily gritted her teeth and swore to what he asked. "Do you mind if I go now?"

Sirius decided not to bring up Voldemort's request, and touched his ring to bring the house out of lockdown. "I'll see you at Christmas."

Lily apparated to the gates of Hogwarts, before storming up to her rooms. Halfway there, she changed her mind and headed for Remus' rooms instead.

Remus pulled open the door to find Lily standing there. "Lily, are you alright?"

"What do you think?" Lily snapped. She then looked Remus up and down. "Going somewhere?"

"I've got a date." Remus was supposed to be meeting Claire.

Lily simply span on her heel and walked back out the room without saying anything.

Remus swore, dashed off a note and called to Hedwig. "Hi, girl. Take this to Claire Grosvenor. There won't be answer."

Hedwig hooted and flew out of the window Remus opened for her. Remus then pulled open his door and headed for Lily's room.

Lily flung open the door at Remus' unrelenting knocking. "I thought you had a date."

Remus pushed by her. "I cancelled."

"You didn't need to on my account." Lily picked up her overnight bag intending to unpack it. "Remus, I've things to do, so just go."

Remus had had enough of Lily's hostility towards him every time he tried to help her. "I've just given up my day off to talk to you and that's what I'm going to do."

"I didn't ask you to." Lily snarled at him. "So why don't you take your cloak, get out and go meet whatever tart you'd planned to."

Remus felt his hackles go up at Lily's description of Claire. "Claire is no tart."

Spoiling for a fight, Lily crossed her arms. "So what does sleeping with you make her then?"

"It makes her a friend who listens to me whenever I've got a problem." Remus snapped. "And at least she doesn't judge people without ever meeting them."

Lily started to walk towards the bedroom. "Remus, just go, apologize for being late and let your friend listen to your problems. I've got more important things to care about right now."

"Because of course, no-one but you has important problems, isn't that right?" Remus threw his hands up in the air. "I give up. If you want to live in your self-imposed shell, then that's fine. I gave up my date because I thought you might be upset after last night and might need to talk. Obviously I was wrong. Lily, I can't keep doing this. Every time I try and help you, you attack me. I'm done."

As Remus stormed out, Lily swept her arm across the table and sent the bowl of fruit which sat on it flying, before upending the table and reducing it to smithereens with her wand. Locking the door, she

marched into the kitchen before proceeding to lay waste to it. She then collapsed onto the floor before dropping her head into her hands and starting to cry.

Harry was on his way from Anna's rooms when he passed his mother's door. From inside he could hear the sound of weeping. Knocking on the door, he called out. "Maman?" Getting no answer he tried the handle but it refused to budge, nor did it open when he tried all the unlocking charms he knew. Frightened he hurried up to his Dad's rooms, hoping that Remus was there.

At the insistent knocking, Remus opened the door to find Harry standing there. "Harry, right now isn't a good time for me."

"It's Maman. I don't know what's happened but she's locked her door. Dad, she's crying and won't answer me." Harry hurriedly informed him.

Remus didn't move. "Lily's already made it patently clear she doesn't need my help."

Harry was taken aback at Remus' refusal. "Then unlock the door for me, and I'll help her."

Swearing, Remus followed Harry out of his rooms. His sharp hearing picked up the sounds of Lily's harsh sobs before he even reached the floor her room was on. Cursing himself for being so soft, he left Harry behind and ran the distance to Lily's rooms before quickly dispelling the complicated locking wards Lily had placed on the door.

Remus stepped into the room and was shocked at what he found. He'd expected a few broken glasses, but not a destroyed table, glass everywhere and Lily sitting bleeding in the middle of it. He turned to Harry who had caught up with him. "I'll take it from here."

Harry just stood there, stunned. "But Dad..."

"Harry, just go." Remus snapped as he made his way across to where Lily was sitting.

Reluctantly Harry left.

Remus picked Lily up from the middle of the glass on the floor. "Come on, let's get you fixed up."

Lily couldn't stop crying. "I'm sorry, Remus."

"We'll talk about it later. Right now, I want to heal those cuts." Remus ran his wand over the cuts before taking Lily into the bedroom and placing her gently on the bed. He then lay down next to her. "Come here."

Lily had thought she couldn't cry much more than she had done already but Remus' gentleness totally undid her. Remus rocked her as she sobbed. Eventually, however, her weeping gave way to a gentle hiccupping, until finally she fell silent.

Lifting Lily's hair, Remus could see that she'd cried herself to sleep. Not wanting to disturb her, Remus lay there and let her sleep.

Lily awoke and wondered why she was lying on something warm. Suddenly she remembered her outburst of earlier.

Remus felt Lily stir. "Lily, are you awake?"

Lily sat up. "I need the bathroom."

Remus let her go. Lily entered the bathroom, gasping at her swollen eyes in the mirror, before using the facilities and washing her hands and face. When she returned to the bedroom, Remus was no longer there. Thinking he'd left her, Lily felt her tears start again. Suddenly she heard a noise in the kitchen. Walking out she found Remus making tea. "Would you like a cup? I managed to find two cups you didn't break beyond repair."

Lily grimaced. "Do I have anything stronger or did I break everything?"

Remus smiled softly. "I'll be back in a minute."

Lily sat down and waited for Remus to return. When he did, he had several bottles of wine and glasses with him.

Remus poured out a glass of wine for both of them. "Are you ready to talk to me, now?"

"I think I owe you an apology first." Lily looked into her glass. "I'm sorry I insulted your friend. I had no right to judge her like that."

"No, you didn't." Remus agreed. "So why did you do it?"

"I don't know." Lily decided to be honest. "I'm lying, Remus. I do know why. When I got back I really needed to see you after last night. When you said you were going on a date, I just felt so angry that you weren't here for me."

"If I'd known you were going to be back early, Lily, I would have called off my date. I didn't expect you back until tomorrow night." Remus put down his wine. "I've always told you I'd be here for you and I will, so why did you still attack me after you found out I'd cancelled."

"This is going to sound awful." Lily laughed nervously and took a mouthful of wine. "Even though you're only my friend, and I have no right to say who you should or shouldn't see, I hated that you were going to see someone."

Remus was shocked. "You were jealous?"

Lily nodded. "I know it's selfish, but you're my best friend, and right now, I don't want to share you with anyone else."

Remus hurried to reassure her. "Lily, no-one will ever come between our friendship. I promise."

Lily relaxed. "I really am sorry but after last night, I just lost it."

"Lily, about last night." Remus sat forward. "Sirius told me who he was."

“Looks like we’ve both been admitted to the club then.” Lily smiled softly. “I couldn’t believe it when he showed me his mask. Even though I already knew who he was, I was so angry at him.”

“Did he hurt you?” Remus asked worriedly.

Lily shook her head. “I’ll admit; he frightened me at one point, which is why I went along with accompanying him to Villa Laurifer. He made it worse when he punished a Death Eater on our way to Harry’s rooms. He was so cold and callous. If I hadn’t already been afraid, I certainly was by then.”

“Why did you agree to keep his secret?” Remus had been able to smell how frightened Lily was when he’d entered the room. “Was it because you were afraid?”

“A little.” Lily admitted. “But I also thought he might be a bit more lax around me if he knew I was okay with who he was.”

“I doubt he’ll ever tell you what’s going on.” Remus disparaged Lily’s idea. “He’s notoriously close mouthed. During most missions he leads, no-one knows what it is or where they’re going until they get there.”

Lily frowned. “Well, it was a worth a try.” She swallowed. “I can’t ever go back to Villa Laurifer though. The whole place gives me the creeps. I don’t know how you can stand it.”

“I’ve been going there for a long time.” Remus reminded her. “You get used to it.”

“I doubt I’d ever get used to it.” Lily put down her wine before she spilled it, as her hands had begun to shake again.

“Lily, there’s something you should know.” Remus thought he’d best give her prior warning. “The Dark Lord wants you to work for him.”

Lily went white. “But I work here.”

“He knows you can do your work wherever you need to.” Remus pointed out.

Lily felt nauseated at the thought. "I can't, Remus. I'm not going to help that monster."

"You might not have any choice, Lily." Remus said gently. "The Dark Lord pretty much has Harry and Jamie as collateral. I know he won't hesitate to use them to get what he wants."

Lily began to pull nervously at her dress. "But Sirius said I wouldn't have to take the Mark."

"The Dark Lord's willing to take you without it." Remus had been relieved when Sirius had told him that.

"Do you know when?" Lily asked.

"No." Remus got up and knelt down in front of her and stilled her hands. "Sirius wouldn't ask you last night because you were angry with him but I know he's not going to hold off forever."

"I'm really not going to have any choice am I?" Lily suddenly realized.

"I don't think so." Remus squeezed Lily's hand.

Lily felt tears coming to her eyes again. "I wish I'd just let Sirius kill me last night."

"If you'd refused last night, he would have simply obliterated you." Remus informed her. "But I doubt Sirius will let you back out now; not now the Dark Lord has made this request. When does Sirius expect you home next?"

"Christmas." Lily got up and started pacing. "I told him I needed some time."

Remus pulled Lily close to him. "Calm down."

Lily looked desperately up at him. "I don't want to go back. I can't bear him anywhere near me."

Remus could feel the tremors that were going through Lily's body. "I'm sorry but there's nothing I can do to help you."

"I know." Lily allowed herself to wrap her arms around Remus, feeling safe and secure for the first time in months.

Remus let her go. "Do you want me to spend the day with me?"

Lily's face lit up. "Would you? I really don't want to be alone."

Remus nodded. "Get changed and meet me in my rooms. I'll get Pasha to come in and clean up in here."

Lily hurried into the bathroom, before stripping off her clothes and getting into the shower. After changing into her most comfortable casuals, Lily headed for Remus' rooms.

When he opened his door, Lily noticed that Remus too had obviously showered as his hair was still wet. "Do you want me to dry your hair?"

Remus laughed. "I haven't exactly got fond memories of your hair-drying skills."

Lily laughed as she remembered making Remus' hair stick up in all directions when they'd been dating. "I didn't think I'd be in this mess back then."

Remus knew what she meant. "Sit down and eat something. Pasha picked up some pate and French toast for me."

Lily's eyes lit up as she suddenly felt hungry. "Duck and orange?"

Remus nodded. "Duck and orange."

Not having eaten since the previous night, Lily tucked in with relish. Remus threw up a privacy bubble. "I need to talk to you about Dumbledore."

Lily kept eating but gave Remus her attention. "Sorry, but I'm starving."

Remus smiled. "Before I left last night, Dumbledore called me into his office..."

The Previous Night

"Headmaster, you wanted to see me." Remus enquired politely.

"Come in and sit down." Albus indicated the chair in front of him.

Remus did as he asked.

"I was reading a report on last week's Hogsmeade attack." Dumbledore began. "I was wondering why you didn't report it to me."

"Because I wasn't informed." Remus wondered why Dumbledore had left it so long to quiz him about the attack.

Dumbledore accepted his explanation. "I also see that his two newest members of the Order were spotted during the attack. Have you discovered who they are yet?"

Remus shook his head and lied. "The Dark Lord has only introduced them to all of us as a group, as I told you previously. I know little more than that at the moment."

Believing that Remus was unable to lie to him, Dumbledore nodded. "Very well. I also have something else to ask you. My rooms were broken into a few days ago. Something was stolen. I wondered if you knew anything about it."

Remus was astounded. "I'm afraid not. Was anything valuable taken?"

Dumbledore shook his head. "It was something more of a sentimental nature than of anything else."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Remus checked the time. "Is there anything else you wanted?"

"You need to be somewhere?" Dumbledore asked.

"The Dark Lord has asked me to be present for a meeting tonight." Remus informed him. "I don't know why."

"Perhaps you'll learn something more about these two new members then." Dumbledore dismissed him. "You may go."

Remus got up. "I'll let you know if I learn anything of value."

"I know you will." Dumbledore returned to his papers as Remus left the room.

Albus put down his papers once Remus had closed the doors. He'd hoped that Remus had heard something about the theft that had occurred. For someone to be able to steal his trunk it would have taken someone of immense power and skill to do it, particularly as all of the portraits in his office and rooms saw and heard nothing.

At first he'd suspected Alice, despite her obvious lack of such traits, but after inviting her over and dosing her tea with Veritaserum, she'd proved to have no knowledge of the break-in. Afterwards he'd had to apologize to her profusely for doubting her when she threatened to leave and never return. Alice had, however, relented in the end and told him she'd see him next month. Albus was relieved. Out of everyone he knew Alice was the one person he relied on. He felt awful for even suspecting her in the first place.

Now his suspicions rested solely on Voldemort and, as far as Albus knew, Remus was only the Death Eater in Hogwarts. However, as he was more than aware that Remus couldn't lie to him, he was back to square one as to who might have betrayed him.

Present Time

"I wonder what was stolen." Lily pondered as she tucked into yet another pate laden cracker.

"I think it's one or more of the Hallows." Remus told her. "Even though he acted calmly, Dumbledore was most definitely upset." It was one of the times when Remus was glad he was a werewolf.

"Voldemort took it didn't he?" Lily guessed.

"I'd say so." Remus surmised. "I think Alice must have told him."

"How did he get into Dumbledore's office?" Lily was frightened at the idea that Voldemort could simply stroll in.

"Alice. Frances said Alice flooded into Dumbledore's office previously. She's obviously got clearance to get in, and if you take someone with you, they will also be able to get in with you." Remus thought for a moment. "Wherever Dumbledore was keeping the Hallows would have been heavily warded. It wouldn't really have been that difficult to work out where he was keeping them."

Lily was horrified. "So Voldemort really could just stroll in here at any time, couldn't he?"

Remus nodded. "It would appear that way; whether he'd get past the guardians to Dumbledore's office is another matter. He'd probably have to blast his way through."

"But you don't know that for sure, do you?" Lily's appetite fled again and she put down the cracker she'd been about to eat.

"No, I don't." Remus admitted.

Lily had another question. "If Alice has Dumbledore's horcrux, why hasn't she destroyed it yet?"

"She may have." Remus informed her. "Just because she's wearing the locket that contained it, doesn't mean that it's still intact."

"So why isn't Dumbledore dead yet then?" Lily hated mysteries.

“Because simply destroying the horcrux isn’t enough to kill Dumbledore.” Remus explained. “Also, I think, that despite what he told Jamie, the Dark Lord wants to kill Dumbledore himself.”

“You mean publicly don’t you?” Lily asked shakily.

“I’d say so.” Remus had a feeling that it was now only a matter of time before Voldemort made a move. Remus had had enough talking about the Dark Lord. “I think we need to cheer ourselves up.”

“If you can find a subject, then good luck.” Lily smiled.

“I made you smile didn’t I?” Remus teased. “How about a glass of champagne?” He held up a hand at Lily’s raised eyebrow. “I know we’ve nothing real to celebrate but who gives a damn.”

Lily loved champagne, and she knew that Remus was well aware of the fact. “If you can find me some strawberries as well, then you’re on.”

Ten minutes later the two friends were tucking into strawberries and drinking champagne. Lily put down her glass. “I wish Anna hadn’t put off her wedding.”

“I’m glad she did. I like knowing Harry has someone else here he can turn to if we’re not around for any reason.” Remus told her. “Dae said he didn’t mind. In fact I think he was kind of relieved. With the Dark Lord gaining strength, I think he likes the idea of Anna being safe in here.”

“But if the Dark Lord can simply walk in with Alice, then she’s not really safe is she?” Lily sighed. “Okay, time for another subject. What do you think about Jamie’s new girlfriend?”

“New girlfriend?” Remus hadn’t heard anything about it.

“He’s been seeing Seville Longbottom for the last week.” Lily giggled. “The whole school has been talking about it.”

"I'm not exactly one for gossip." Remus pointed out. "I'd heard someone mention the two of them in the same sentence, but I thought it was just another rumor."

Lily shook her head. "It's no rumor. Harry said that since Jamie and Ron split up, Seville began to see Jamie a little differently."

"She's only a third year though." Remus pointed out. "Don't you think she's a little young?"

"And what about your own daughters, Remus?" Lily couldn't resist. "I don't see it being much longer before Neville finally gets up the courage to ask Georgie out formally, and Auri's been running after Draco for as long as I can remember."

Remus groaned. "Do you think I'm going to have to give the boys the talk?"

Lily burst out laughing. "I think you might but to be honest, Neville and Draco are both sensible enough not to take advantage of the girls."

Remus relaxed as he realized that Lily was right. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather talk about the Dark Lord?"

Lily giggled. "Not unless there's something going on between the two of you, you haven't told me about."

Remus threw a cushion at her. "Well thanks for that lovely imagery." He grinned, happy to see Lily smiling again. "Let's go for a walk."

Lily got up and the two of them bundled up before leaving Remus' rooms.

Later that evening

Lily followed Remus back into his rooms. "I really enjoyed the movie."

Remus was glad he'd cancelled his date. Even with Lily's upset earlier, he hadn't had such a nice time for ages. "Do you want to a nightcap?"

Lily nodded. "If there's any champagne left, I wouldn't say no."

The two of them huddled round the fire, Lily contentedly sipping the champagne. "Remus, can I stay here tonight?"

"Of course." Remus made the fire climb higher. "Harry's room is free."

"I meant with you." Lily said quietly.

Remus was shocked. "I don't think that's a good idea, Lily."

Lily realized Remus had misunderstood. "I'm not asking to sleep with you, Rem. I want one night where I feel safe. I just want you to hold me."

Remus felt both disappointed and relieved at the same time. "I'll get Pasha to fetch your pajamas and overnight things." He called the little elf and she disappeared before returning with Lily's things. "Take the master bathroom. I can use Harry's."

Lily padded into the bathroom and slipped into her pajamas before making her way into Remus' room. She giggled at the sight of Remus in his pajamas, as she had done when she'd seen him at Grimmauld Square.

Remus scowled. "I thought we'd done this the last time."

"I'm sorry, but you look so wrong." Lily told him.

"Normally I sleep in the nude, Lily." Remus couldn't resist teasing her.

Lily blushed. "You don't have to wear your pajama top if you don't want to. It's not as if I haven't seen your chest before."

Remus didn't like to point out that she'd actually seen more than that before. "Get into bed; I'll turn down the lights."

Lily climbed in and shivered as the bed was cold. "Haven't you ever heard of warming the bed, Remus?"

"I prefer my bed cold." Remus climbed in beside her, before pulling off the hated pajama top.

Lily giggled. Remus sighed. "What now?"

"Nothing; it's just that you're like some virgin bride waiting until you'd turned the light off to take off your top." Lily couldn't help herself and her giggles turned into large belly laughs.

Remus laughed as well. "I just didn't want to embarrass you."

Lily stopped laughing. "Thank you."

"You're welcome. Now go to sleep." Remus ordered as he lay back against the pillows.

"Rem?" Lily's voice sounded small all of a sudden.

Remus sighed. "What, Lily?"

"Hold me." Lily didn't want to touch him without asking first.

Remus scooted across to Lily's side of the bed. "Come here then."

Lily happily snuggled up under his arm and laid her head on his chest. "You didn't have this much hair the last time we did this."

"The last time we did this we were still in school, Lily." Remus wryly pointed out. "I'd like to think I've matured a little since then."

Lily was more than aware that Remus had matured since then but decided to make a joke to hide her discomfort. "Just think, only another few years and they'll all be grey."

"And on that note, Madam, I think it's time we got some sleep." Remus told her.

Without thinking, Lily tilted her head slightly and dropped a kiss on Remus' chest. "Night Rem."

Knowing that Lily probably hadn't meant anything by it, Remus resisted the urge to drag Lily up the bed and kiss her; instead kissing her lightly on top of her head. "Night Lily."

The Next Morning

Harry awoke gasping. Glad he'd set up silencing charms, he quickly headed for the bathroom before getting dressed. The sun was just coming up as he left the room. He needed to see his Dad.

Next Chapter: Harry makes a discovery; Harry and Hermione grow closer; Voldemort makes another attack; Christmas arrives.

Chapter 58: The Sphere

Remus heard a soft knocking at his door, before whomever it was opened the door and quietly entered his rooms. Checking that Lily was still sleeping, Remus slid out of bed and walked into his sitting room. "Harry, what's wrong?"

Harry jumped. "Morning, Dad. Sorry, I didn't mean to wake you. I was just going to sit here and wait until you got up."

"What for?" Remus enquired.

"I had a dream I need to talk to you about." Harry lit the fire wondering why Remus was hovering around. "Is everything alright?"

"Err, yes." Remus shivered slightly. "Look, why don't I get dressed and you can meet me back here in say, half an hour."

"I'll just wait here." Harry thought his Dad looked a little stressed. "I can make you a cup of tea."

Suddenly a rustling noise came from the bedroom. Harry felt embarrassed as he realized why Remus had seemed so on edge. "Sorry Dad. I didn't realize you had someone with you. You should have just said."

Remus was about to move Harry towards the door when Lily stuck her head around the bedroom door. "Rem, do you have..." Her voice died away at the sight of Harry standing there.

Harry's mouth fell open. "Are you two...?"

Remus and Lily looked at each other before they both cried out. "No."

Harry felt disappointed. "Oh."

Lily came out of the bedroom in her pajamas, and looked at Remus' bare chest. "Remus, I think you might want to get something on. I'm sure Harry doesn't want you to catch a cold."

Remus walked back into the bedroom to pick up a sweater, before coming back out to explain to Harry why he'd found Lily in his room. "Lily didn't want to be alone last night."

"So you had a slumber party?" Harry teased, grinning at his mother.

Lily scowled at her son. "Not exactly." She then explained what had happened to her.

By the time she'd finished, Harry's smile had fled. "Isn't it enough for him that Jamie and I are part of his bloody scheme without having to drag you into it as well?"

Lily shook her head. "I don't think he sees it that way. Sirius did it as a way of protecting me. I think he actually does love me in his own sick twisted fashion." Lily shuddered at the thought of her husband.

Harry shared a look with Remus. "I don't want you in Villa Laurifer, Maman." Harry remembered what he'd witnessed after apparating into the main arrival area with Jamie before their 'excursion' to Hogsmeade. What he'd seen passing as entertainment in the ballroom had sickened him to his stomach.

"I don't want me in Villa Laurifer either." Lily informed him. "And I've decided that I'm not going to do it. I've promised Sirius to keep his secret and that's it. I couldn't cope with having to go back there again; I'd go to pieces."

Remus shared another look with his son. "But what if the Dark Lord threatens Harry and Jamie?"

"We'll be fine, Dad." Harry told him. "Sirius is hardly going to go out and find himself another apprentice after all the effort he's put into training me, and, not meaning to boast, but I know I'm as good as he says I am. Jamie, on the other hand, is the Dark Lord's poster boy, or at least he will be if his identity is ever made public. At the very least, I think Maman could bargain to work at home."

Remus wasn't so sure. "I don't know, Harry."

Lily brought up another sticking point. "Sirius is aware that I'll have Cassie with me when I do return home. He can hardly expect me to take a child into that hellhole."

Remus was still worried. "Lily, please think this through very carefully before saying no. I don't want Harry's life jeopardized for the sake of performing a few simple tasks."

"Don't worry, Remus. If he threatens the boys, then I'll back off but I'm saying no first." Lily told him. Looking up at the clock on the mantelpiece Lily looked at Harry. "Why are you here so early?"

"I had a dream." Harry told her. "I know what's in the sphere that Professor Snape saw in my mind."

"And?" Remus asked anxiously.

Harry looked grim. "A memory."

"Why hide a memory in the sphere?" Lily asked.

"Because it's the memory of how to cast the runic spell that sent the other Harry back through time; the whole spell though. Either Peri didn't know there was more to it than she told us, or she didn't want us to learn about it." Harry shivered. "I can understand why."

"Perhaps you'd better tell us about it." Remus told him.

Harry's Dream

Harry looked round to find himself standing in the center of a field next to a huge stone wall. Inset into the wall was a large wooden door with a brass handle. Trying the handle, and finding it unlocked, Harry entered it to find another wall, this time made up of shrubbery. An archway of rose bushes led through to yet more walls, and Harry realized he was in a maze. Wondering which way to go, Harry found himself being gently buffeted by a warm wind that was blowing in the direction of one of the pathways. The wind continued to blow until Harry eventually reached the center, where it suddenly ceased.

There, floating in the very center of the maze itself was a slowly rotating sphere which had no discernable seams or method of entry. Harry walked up to it and as it completed a full circle, Harry noticed that there were markings on it. As he moved closer, he realized that most of the markings resembled the Snape family crest. Below the crest lay another mark, which matched the Snape heir mark he carried behind his ear. Touching the mark on the sphere, Harry was disappointed when nothing happened.

After watching several revolutions, Harry spotted a symbol that looked like the Potter and Snape heir marks interlaced. Harry touched it, crying out as the heir marks on his body began to burn. The sphere split apart and Harry was bathed in what felt like warm water before suddenly being immersed in a memory.

The Memory

Harry watched Potter, as Harry preferred to call the alternate Harry, place twelve runic stones into a fairly large bowl. The alternate Severus stood watching silently.

Mione pushed open the door. "Are you ready Harry?"

Potter shook his head. "I don't want to do it, Mione."

Mione scowled. "We're doing it."

"I don't want to sacrifice you for a spell that might not even work." Potter barked out.

"It will work." Mione was confident in her's and Luna's findings.

Potter looked over to where his father stood. "Isn't there some other way?"

Severus shook his head. "You know there isn't Harry."

"Severus is right." Mione told him. "We haven't found the final Horcrux and his army is camped outside. Today is our last chance."

"Why did you leave it until now to tell me about this part? You knew I thought you'd be miles away." Potter snapped.

"I didn't tell you last night because I wanted our last time together to be special." Mione touched his face. "Please, Harry, if you love me, then do this for me."

"I can't, Mione." Potter protested.

"Luna would have wanted you to." Mione knew her words would hurt him.

"That's low, even for you." Potter took a deep breath. "Close your eyes."

Shaking, Mione did as he asked, before opening them again. "Kiss me one last time, Harry."

Potter pulled her roughly to him and kissed her as if he didn't want to let her go, before pulling away. "I love you, Mione."

"I love you too." Mione closed her eyes again.

Potter raised his wand. "Stupefy."

Mione crumpled towards the ground; Potter catching her as she fell. Severus walked over with a knife. "You have to do it as it's you who's going to be travelling back."

Potter looked down at his unconscious friend. "I don't think I can do this to her."

"I'd take her place if I could but you know very well that while I love you, and I'm willing to make the sacrifice, I obviously haven't been intimate with you. The spell won't work without that." Severus pointed out. "Harry, too many people have died to go back now."

Tears in his eyes, Potter took the knife and held it above Mione's wrist. "Pass me the bowl."

Severus slid the bowl under Mione's arm, and then watched impassively as Harry sliced the knife across her wrist and blood began to leak into the bowl.

Potter waited until the bowl was filled, and the runes were covered, before healing the cut.

"What are you doing Harry?" Severus asked quietly. "The spell said drained of life's blood."

"I'm not letting someone else I care about die because of him." Potter looked up at his father. "Get me some blood replenishing potions."

Severus hurried out of the room, only to return a few moments later with the requested potions. He wondered, however, whether Harry had waited too long to stop the bleeding as he looked at the parchment colored face of the girl lying in his son's arms.

Potter silently took the potions and gently fed them to Mione, rubbing her throat to make her swallow. After he'd fed the last one to her, he enervated her. "Mione, wake up."

Mione groaned. "Harry, why aren't I dead?"

"I couldn't do it." Potter laid her gently down. "I need to complete the spell." He then carefully picked up the bowl and moved it onto a table. Taking his wand out, he held his breath before casting the spell. "Absorbeo." A brilliant white flash blinded everyone for a moment before it died away. When Potter looked into the bowl, the blood was gone and the runic stones were now imbued with a deep reddish tinge.

Mione by now had struggled to her feet. "You idiot. You should have just let me die. I'm probably going to die out there today anyway. By not letting me die you could have jeopardized the spell. You could end up years from where you want to be, or your memories may not remain intact."

"I'm willing to take that chance." Potter told her. "If it doesn't work, then I'll see you and Luna in the afterlife. But I'd rather give you a

chance to go out fighting than dying by bleeding out on the kitchen floor.”

Mione was saved from further argument when the door opened and Kingsley put his head around. “It’s time, folks.”

The memory then wavered and Harry found himself in a vaguely familiar office.

Potter finished placing the stones in an evenly spaced circle on the floor before writing runic inscriptions in the gaps between them.

Harry watched as Severus went over to Professor McGonagall and asked if she understood what would happen if it worked. Harry wondered why she didn’t answer him, instead merely nodding and holding onto Severus’ hand.

Having finished his work, Potter stood at the edge of the runic circle.

“Father, you are the best thing that ever happened to me, and I...”. Potter’s voice trailed off.

Severus hugged Potter, only to pull away when a yell from outside the door interrupted their embrace.

Potter then stepped into the circle, drew his wand and spoke out loud. “Retrogradus Tractus Prerago.” As Potter spoke the last word, the door flew open to reveal a very different Voldemort than Harry was used to. Just as the memory went black, Harry heard Voldemort let out a frustrated scream.

Present Time

“The memory just ends there.” Harry told his parents. “I think Potter screwed up the timeline when he didn’t bleed his friend dry.”

“Nice way of putting it, Harry.” Lily remarked wryly. “Why do you think the memory was in the sphere?”

“Would you want a memory like that floating around?” Harry countered. “I can’t keep the memory. Even though my Occlumency has improved, I still don’t want to take the chance. If Sirius or the Dark Lord ever rips that out of my mind, could you imagine the damage they could do to the timeline?”

Remus could. “Do you want me to obliviate you of it?”

Harry thought it would be for the best. “Once I’ve placed it in a pensieve. I think you’d better erase my telling you two about it as well.”

Remus got up and fetched his pensieve. “Okay, Harry. Place the memory in there. I think your memory of Severus telling you about the sphere should go into it as well as any other memories you might have of the sphere or the spell.”

Harry placed his wand to his temple and withdrew the requisite memories, before dropping them into the pensieve; stopping only when he’d determined that he’d withdrawn them all. “Now what?”

Remus picked up his wand and aimed it at his tense looking son. “Harry, it won’t hurt.”

“Sorry.” Harry closed his eyes.

Remus smiled. “Obliviate.”

Harry’s eyes became glazed. When he came round, he found himself lying on a sofa in his Dad’s sitting room. “What am I doing here?”

“I found you outside my door. You said that you were feeling dizzy and the next thing I knew you’d passed out, so I carried you in here.” Remus lied.

Harry had a hazy memory of wanting to see Remus but that was it. “I’m starting to feel okay again now.”

Remus laid a hand on Harry’s arm. “Why don’t you sit here for a few minutes? If you’re still feeling unwell after that, I’ll take you to Madam

Pomfrey. Otherwise, I think you should head down to the Great Hall for some breakfast.” Remus glanced at the clock. “They should be serving it soon.”

Harry guessed that Remus must have heard him coming along the corridor. “I’m sorry for waking you up so early.”

“That’s okay.” Remus told him quietly. “I’m always here for you.”

Harry sat up. “I feel fine now. If I don’t feel well again, I’ll go see Madam Pomfrey.”

“Do you want me to walk you down to breakfast?” Remus offered.

“I’ll be alright.” Harry now felt as if he’d never been dizzy. “I’ll see you in class tomorrow. I’m supposed to be spending the rest of today with Hermione in the Room.”

Remus frowned. “Harry, please be careful.”

Knowing exactly what his Dad meant, Harry blushed. “Dad, I do know that.”

“And I know what it was like to be fifteen.” Remus decided to let him off the hook. “Now off you go. I’m going back to bed to catch up on my sleep.”

“See you tomorrow.” Harry opened the door and went out.

Remus walked slowly back into his bedroom to find Lily tucked under the covers. “He’s gone.”

“I take it you obliviated his memory of us?” Lily asked.

Remus nodded. “I thought it might be a good idea. The last thing we need is Sirius finding out you spent the night here, no matter how innocent it was.”

“I know what you mean.” Lily snuggled down further under the covers. “I don’t want to get up yet.”

Remus headed towards the bathroom. "I'll be back in a minute."

Lily closed her eyes and smiled softly as she felt the bed dip a few moments later, as Remus climbed beneath the covers and pulled off his sweater. "Draatted thing itches."

Lily laughed, and opened her eyes. "For someone who turns into a werewolf once a month, you seem to have a strange dislike for anything that comes from a sheep."

Remus knew Lily was the only person who could tease him about being a werewolf and get away with it. "So what's wrong with not liking woolly sweaters?"

"Why buy them if you don't like them?" Lily pointed out.

"It was an impulse purchase." Remus told her as he lay back against the pillows. "I just grabbed it this morning when you told me to get something on because it was cold and Harry was here."

Lily giggled as she thought about her son. "Harry's face was hysterical."

"I wish I'd had a camera." Remus burst out laughing. "I couldn't believe that he actually thought I'd slept with you."

Lily felt hurt at Remus' statement. "What's so amusing about sleeping with me? Am I really so awful that Harry shouldn't even have considered it as a possibility?"

Realizing that he'd upset her, Remus lifted himself up onto his elbow and looked down at Lily. "Of course not, Lily."

Lily didn't feel convinced. "Well that's what it sounded like to me."

Remus lifted his hand and ran it over Lily's cheek. "I'd never say anything like that about you, Lily."

Lily could feel her heart beginning to race at Remus' touch. "I know you wouldn't, Rem. I was only teasing you."

Remus shook his head. "No you weren't."

Lily sighed. "You're right. I wasn't."

Remus looked repentant as he continued to stroke Lily's face. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have phrased it quite like that."

"Then how should you have phrased it?" Lily asked, her voice sounding almost breathless to her own ears.

Remus ran his thumb over Lily's bottom lip, biting back a groan as Lily's lips parted under the gentle pressure. "I should have said 'Harry was surprised but he shouldn't have been'."

"And?" Lily couldn't concentrate as Remus continued to gently caress her face.

"And then I should have said, 'Lily you're a beautiful and intelligent woman. Any man would be blessed to have spent the night with you.'" Remus told her.

"You really mean that don't you?" Lily could hear her voice trembling.

Remus nodded. "I wouldn't say it, if I didn't."

"And then what?" Lily didn't want the moment to end.

"And then I'd lean over, a little like I'm doing now, cup your face and ask, 'May I?'" Remus stopped stroking Lily's cheekbone and cupped her face gently.

Frightened of how she was feeling, Lily answered him shakily. "And then I'd say, 'May you what?'"

"To which I'd respond 'May I kiss you?'" Remus held his breath.

Lily knew that Remus would let her go if she said no. Making her decision, she slid her hand into Remus' hair. "And I'd say 'yes'."

Remus lowered his head and hesitated. "Are you sure, Lily?"

Not bothering to answer the question, Lily closed the gap between the two of them herself.

Remus could feel himself shaking as he gently parted Lily's lips and deepened the kiss she'd initiated. Lily could feel Remus' tremors as he kissed her.

Remus ended the kiss by releasing Lily's lips to press small butterfly kisses over Lily's nose, eyes and cheeks before pulling away.

"Rem?" Lily asked hesitantly.

Remus lay looking down at her. "I can't, Lily."

"Don't you want me?" Lily felt tears well up in her eyes.

Remus gently wiped away one as it fell down her cheek towards the pillow. "More than I've ever wanted anyone or anything in my entire life. But you're still married to Sirius."

Lily couldn't believe that Remus had finally got a conscience. "But you've slept with married women before, haven't you?"

Remus didn't like being reminded of his past. "Unfortunately yes. But Lily, they weren't you. When we make love, I want to do it without the specter of your husband hanging over our heads."

"But I don't care about Sirius. I don't love him." Lily protested.

"I know that Lily." Remus stroked her cheek softly again. "But I'm afraid that if we make love, there's every chance I'll lose control."

Suddenly Lily understood the reticence behind Remus' withdrawal. "You'd mark me again, wouldn't you?"

Remus knew what he'd be admitting if he said yes. "I would."

Lily didn't care. "Then mark me, Rem."

Remus shook his head. "You know that glamours don't work that well on a werewolf bite. You wouldn't be able to cover it up. Sirius would know where it had come from and what it meant."

Lily knew Remus was right. Damning Sirius to hell, she wrapped her arm around Remus' waist. "Then just hold me."

Remus knew that they'd have to talk at some point but at that moment, he did exactly as Lily requested.

The Room

Harry looked up as the door opened and Hermione walked in. He jumped up. "Did you bring your runes textbook? I forgot mine."

Hermione frowned. "No good morning. No kiss."

Harry grinned and tugged Hermione towards him. "Good morning, Hermione." He then kissed her. "Now can I have the book?"

Hermione slapped his arm. "Fine." She rummaged through her bag and held out the book. "But kiss me again first."

Instead, Harry grabbed Hermione's hand and fell backwards onto the sofa, dragging her with him until she was sitting on top of him and leaning backwards against his bent legs. "Harry!" Hermione hadn't expected Harry to be quite so forceful.

Harry was immediately all concern. "Did I hurt you?"

Hermione giggled. "Got you!"

Harry began to tickle her; his legs preventing her retreat. "I'll teach you."

Hermione shrieked as Harry tickled her mercilessly. "I give in. I give in."

Harry halted in mid-tickle. "What do I get if I stop?"

Hermione leant forward and kissed him, answering his question. Harry pulled Hermione closer, and deepened the kiss that Hermione had begun, sliding his tongue into her mouth to tangle with her own. Hermione reacted by grabbing Harry's hair and tugging it gently. Sliding his mouth from Hermione's mouth to her throat, Harry nibbled gently on the vein that was throbbing there, making Hermione moan.

As he continued to kiss her neck, Harry slid his arm around Hermione's back, gently coercing her until eventually her entire body was in full contact with his own, while at the same time sliding his other hand down to cup her bottom. Hermione twisted, forcing Harry to relinquish her neck, so that she could kiss him again. As Hermione nibbled softly on his bottom lip, Harry slipped his hand under the back of her blouse, and began to stroke Hermione's back before sliding her blouse up, exposing her bare skin. While she was enjoying it, Hermione suddenly began to feel a little panicky at the sensations that Harry was invoking, and pulled away. "Harry, please stop."

Harry immediately rolled Hermione off him and took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I think I got a little carried away."

Hermione smiled shakily. "So did I."

In the last few weeks, things between the two of them had progressed from simple kissing to becoming more heated; each time with one of them pushing the other just a little bit further. Harry knew that this was the sort of thing that Remus had warned him about earlier that morning.

Hermione straightened her clothing and hair. "I think we should sit at a table and try to get some studying done."

Harry picked up his book bag as a large wooden table appeared with the chairs set at least ten feet apart from each other. Harry grinned at his girlfriend. "Are you trying to say something?"

Hermione laughed, and the table shrank. "We really need to study Harry."

Harry put down his books and opened them up. "Let's get on with it then."

Four hours later they'd finished their work. Harry looked over at Hermione. "Do you want to stay here or head back to Slytherin?"

Hermione looked disappointed. "I thought we were staying here all day."

"I just thought that after earlier, you know." Harry didn't want to pressure Hermione.

Reaching across the table to grab Harry by his sweater, Hermione yanked him towards her and kissed him. "I think I'd rather stay here." She then bit him hard on the nose. "That'll teach you for tickling me earlier."

Harry growled softly and changed into his animagus form, making Hermione squeal in delight as she pushed back her chair and attempted to run. She didn't get far, as Harry easily leapt over the table and landed in front of her before rearing up on his hind legs to gently shove her down onto a large, soft rug that appeared as she fell. He then changed back. "You don't get away with it that easily, Hermione Snape."

Hermione giggled. "And what exactly are you going to do about it, Harry Lupin?"

Harry kissed her. "This." He then kissed her again. "And this." He kissed her one last time. "And this."

Hermione pouted when he tried to get up. "Where do you think you're going?"

"Nowhere." Harry smiled as he flopped back down beside her, and pulled her close to him. "I feel a little guilty you know."

Hermione wrapped her arms around him. "Why?"

"Because Dudley wanted the Room today." Harry told her.

"They're not, you know?" Hermione asked quietly.

"No." At least Harry hoped his brother wasn't. "He said that Luna wanted to walk on the beach under a full moon."

Hermione sighed. "That's so romantic."

Harry rolled to his feet and pulled Hermione up with him. The Room changed and a moonlit beach, where waves lapped gently against the shore, appeared. Hermione sighed again. "I can see why Luna wanted to do this."

Harry couldn't as it reminded him of his Dad, but knew better than to say so to Hermione. "Let's go for a walk then."

The two of them then spent the remainder of the day on the beach, watching as the sun came up and the beach came to life. Harry eventually checked the time. "I'd better get going."

Hermione kissed him softly. "I'll see you on Tuesday night."

Harry shook his head. "I can't. I've got quidditch practice. We almost lost the last game."

Hermione grinned. "We're going to beat you one day, Lupin."

Harry disagreed. "Not while I'm seeker you won't, Snape." Harry then kissed his girlfriend one last time before picking up his book bag. The Room reverted to a plain room with a table in it. "I'll see you on Thursday instead."

Hermione hated having to wait but understood. "I'll see you then."

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Harry headed downstairs for breakfast. Nia smiled brightly at him as he walked into the kitchen. "I've done you a full breakfast. What time are you heading off to see Remus?"

"About ten." Harry had made plans to do his Christmas shopping at Diagon Alley with Remus as, after the attack on Hogsmeade, everyone had been banned from Hogsmeade visits. Dudley and Luna had gone out the previous day with Grim.

"Are the girls still going with you?" Nia asked.

Harry nodded as he took a bite of his bacon. "I'll floo with them to Grimmauld Square."

Auri ran into the kitchen. "Aren't you ready to go yet?" She was excited and looking forward to getting Draco a gift. Even though he still hadn't formally asked her out yet, Auri was hoping he'd finally get round to it during the holidays.

"Yes, Harry." Georgie followed her sister. "Some of us have been up for hours."

Harry couldn't tell them that Sirius had summoned him the previous night, and he hadn't gotten back until late. "I was tired."

Nia shepherded the two girls out of the room. "Leave your brother alone."

Twenty minutes later the three of them found themselves at Diagon Alley, Scarlett and the two older girls holding onto to their father's arms. Harry had discreetly apparated himself, telling his sisters he'd floored behind them to save Remus from coming back.

As they made their way up the main street and into Quality Quidditch Supplies, Harry winced slightly as did Remus. Remus turned to the girls. "I need you girls to return to Grimmauld Square."

Auri frowned. "What's wrong, Dad?"

“Nothing.” Remus lied. “I’ve just remembered that Harry has an appointment at Gringotts, and you lot can’t attend. I’ll be back to collect you as soon as I can.”

Auri knew Remus was lying but she didn’t know why. “But Dad. We can just wait...”

Remus shook his head. “No, Auri. You’re going back. Will you be alright flooing on your own?”

Auri pulled a face. “Of course.”

Remus marched the girls to the Leaky Cauldron. “Go.”

Georgie stopped. “Where’s Harry?”

“He must have headed for Gringotts already.” Remus knew that the girls hadn’t noticed Harry slipping away as he’d hurriedly escorted them back to the pub. “Now all of you get into that fireplace and go.”

Sighing, the three girls climbed into the fireplace together, and Auri threw down the floo powder, only for nothing to happen.

Remus swore as he felt wards slam into place. “Fuck.”

“Daddy!” Scarlett was horrified at Remus’ language.

Remus knew he had little time as a woman rushed into the pub. “Death Eaters.”

Auri turned a frightened face to her Dad as she realized that he must have somehow known that something was going to happen. “Dad, what’s going on?”

“Come with me.” Remus hurriedly led the girls out onto the Muggle side of the pub, thankful his Dark Mark would let him open the door. He knew that none of the other patrons would have such an easy time of it. “Take this.”

Auri took the Muggle money. She looked nervously at her Dad. "What do you want me to do?"

"Take care of Georgie and Scarlett." Remus was aware that he couldn't apparate the girls out without their bearing a Dark Mark. "I'll transfigure your clothing. Come with me." Remus led them to a large department store which had recently opened up next door to the pub, before pushing open the door. "Get in there and stay hidden as much as possible. I don't think this will spill out onto this side but I don't know for sure."

Auri didn't move. "Why can't we just walk to Grimmauld Square?"

Remus felt frustrated at his daughter's stubbornness. "Because there are wards in place which, as witches, won't let you three leave the area, even on this Muggle side. Now go."

Seeing Auri was about to argue again, Georgie took hold of Scarlett's hand and pulled her sister by the arm. "Dad can explain later. I think he really needs to go, Auri."

Remus waited until his daughters had disappeared up an escalator and onto the the first floor of the department store before leaving the store. Only then did he answer the persistent nagging of his Dark Mark and apparate away.

As soon as Remus made his way into his Master's room he knew that he was going to pay the price for being late. "My Lord."

"I was quite sure I requested your presence more than five minutes ago. Everyone else managed to get here on time." Voldemort indicated the remainder of the Order.

Remus kept kneeling. "I apologize."

"Crucio." Voldemort kept it on Remus briefly as he didn't want to do any lasting damage to his Lieutenant.

Remus managed to keep his position, and didn't cry out. Voldemort looked down at him. "You may rise."

"Thank you, my Lord." Remus took his place next to Voldemort.

"Now that Praeses has finally managed to grace us with his presence, I'll begin." Voldemort began to explain what he wanted each of them to do.

Remus apparated out onto Diagon Alley. The common Death Eaters had done their job and the area he'd apparated into was almost empty except for the odd pockets of resistance. He turned to Harry and Lucius who had both been told to accompany him. "Take the stores on the right. If anyone refuses to surrender, then kill them."

Harry knew that Remus had little choice in ordering him to do that. He wondered how Jamie was getting on with Sirius and Alice. He had a feeling that neither of them would be particularly kind to Jamie if he didn't manage to do as they ordered.

Harry walked into Flourish & Blotts to find himself facing Severus and several Death Eaters engaged in a heated exchange. Harry was thankful that Hermione didn't appear to be around. Lucius decided this would be a wonderful opportunity to see if Harry really was as good as Amicus had told him. "He's all yours, Alumno."

Harry stepped forward. "Everyone cease fire." At Harry's clipped command, the three Death Eaters stopped immediately, one catching a reducto on the arm that Severus had fired off before he'd lowered his own wand as he recognized Harry. Severus knew Hermione wouldn't be happy with him if he harmed her boyfriend.

"Surrender or die, Snape." Harry ordered.

Severus knew that if he surrendered, he was going to be finding himself a guest of the Dark Lord; if he didn't, then he knew that Harry had more than likely been ordered to kill him. Severus made his decision and dropped his wand.

Harry felt his heart sink, and he snapped at the three common Death Eaters standing next to him. "Take him."

Lucius hadn't expected Severus to give up so easily. "I didn't anticipate that."

Harry shrugged. "There were five of us against one as well as the others over there. I'd say it was a sensible move. It wasn't as if any of the customers here were going to step in and help." The customers in question were mostly schoolchildren and they had all been shuffled into a corner by the few adults left alive. A group of Death Eaters who'd been entertained by Severus' firefight with their colleagues, stood over them.

Lucius presumed that Harry wasn't aware of Severus' treachery. "He's a traitor to the Dark Lord, Alumno. Our Master will take great pleasure in teaching him what happens to such men."

Harry hid his fear for Severus. "Let's go, we need to check the other stores. Everything seems to be in order here."

Lucius followed Harry out and they continued up the street.

I should mention that even though Lucius was testing Harry, he has no idea of who Harry really is.

Next Chapter: The next chapter won't be a particularly pleasant one: Lily and Sirius; We learn of Severus' fate; Remus has some explaining to do.

Chapter 59: Promotion, Pain and Punishment

Later that Day

Harry apparated back to Villa Laurifer directly into his rooms, where he found Sirius sitting waiting for him. Sirius stood up. "Are you injured at all?"

"No. We didn't really encounter that much resistance." Harry informed him as he pulled off his mask.

"You'll need to put that back on. Our Master has an example he wants to make." Sirius replaced his own mask and headed towards the door.

Harry hid his annoyance and replaced the mask, before following Sirius down to Voldemort's private chambers. When they got there, he found three Death Eaters kneeling in front of Voldemort.

Harry felt his stomach go over as he recognized them as the Death Eaters he'd ordered to take Snape away. Harry knelt next to them. "My Lord."

"Alumno." Voldemort smiled nastily. "I believe you ordered these three to take custody of a prisoner for you."

Harry had a horrible feeling he was going to be the example. "I did, my Lord."

"Do you see the prisoner here now?" Voldemort asked silkily.

"No, my Lord." While relieved that Severus had somehow managed to elude Voldemort's grasp, Harry could feel sweat beginning to run down his back as he contemplated his own fate.

"Praeses." Voldemort called Remus forward.

"Yes, my Lord?" Remus answered calmly, even though his stomach was tied up in knots knowing what Voldemort was about to ask him to do.

“Alumno needs to be taught a lesson.” Voldemort ordered. “Deal with him.”

Harry braced himself as Remus aimed his wand at him. “Crucio.”

Harry crumpled screaming to the floor as Remus held the spell on him until Voldemort indicated that he should end it. “Enough.”

“Alumno, you may rise.” Voldemort wanted to see how harshly Remus had dealt with his son.

Harry tried to get up, only to fall back down to his knees, his shaking legs refusing to support him. Remus backhanded him. “He said get up.”

Harry tried to ignore the blood that was now pouring from his split lip and climb to his feet, only for Remus to grab him by the back of his neck and yank him up.

Voldemort looked stern as he addressed Harry. “Alumno, please don’t ever disappoint me again. Next time I won’t be as lenient with you.”

“I won’t. Thank you, my Lord.” Harry knew better than to argue.

Remus finally released his hold, hoping that Harry would remain on his feet this time. Without Remus’ somewhat painful grip on his neck, Harry could feel his legs threatening to give way but he forced himself to stay standing as he watched Voldemort scrutinize the three Death Eaters to his left. “Alumno was simply the start of the demonstration. Now what do you suppose is going to happen to you three, who actually had custody of my prisoner and let him escape?”

One of the Death Eaters began to cry, and Harry realized that it was actually a woman. A door in the back of the room opened and Amicus, who had slipped out whilst Harry was being punished, led in a white masked Death Eater. “My Lord.”

“Amicus.” Voldemort smiled at his friend before turning to the Death Eater accompanying Amicus. “As an initiate I would normally require you to perform two tasks for me. Today I ask for three.”

The unknown Death Eater knelt in front of Voldemort. “I will do whatever you command, my Lord.”

Voldemort indicated the three Death Eaters in front of him. “You have three curses you may use, the Cruciatus, the Imperius and the Killing Curse; one for each Death Eater. How you use them is up to you.”

The initiate pulled out his wand, only for Voldemort to hold up his hand. “I think it only fair you see who is before you.” Voldemort turned to the kneeling Death Eaters. “Take off your masks.”

Jamie smothered his gasp as he recognized Ginny; he’d never seen the other two before though. Jamie felt nauseous as he watched one of the men begin to cry. The other one, however, remained stalwart and appeared resigned to his fate.

Voldemort then turned to the initiate. “And I think it only equally reasonable that they see who is dealing with them.”

The initiate removed his mask to reveal Blaise Zabini. Harry watched Ginny become rigid as she recognized her fiancé.

Blaise stepped slowly up to the three Death Eaters kneeling before him. Ginny tried to stay calm as she waited for Blaise to use the Cruciatus on her. He didn’t.

Knowing that he still had two curses left, Ginny still didn’t panic. Blaise left the Death Eater he’d crucioed lying on the floor before turning to Ginny and casting the Imperius on her. “Kill the man lying on the floor and then kill yourself.”

At first Ginny’s face relaxed, and unable to help herself, she raised her wand and executed the Death Eater who lay begging for forgiveness on the floor. Harry had mixed emotions as he observed Ginny struggling hard to oppose the Imperius curse Blaise was holding on her; Ginny’s look changing to one of stark terror as she

fought against it. She'd just put the wand to her head and started to utter the words of the killing curse, when suddenly she gasped and lowered her wand back down.

Crying softly with relief, Ginny knelt back down before Voldemort. "My Lord."

"You fell short of my high standards today, Prewett." Voldemort watched as the girl shook. "This time I'm willing to be magnanimous and let you live. However, let this be a lesson for you for the future. You may leave."

"Thank you my Lord." Ginny didn't need telling twice and, slipping on her mask, hurried out of the room, her legs shaking almost uncontrollably.

The final Death Eater knew which curse was to be his. As the senior Death Eater it had been his duty to make sure Snape didn't escape and he'd failed. Knowing the punishment for failure, he simply looked Blaise in the eye, and invited his death. "Go ahead."

Blaise hesitated for what felt like an eternity to Harry, before shakily raising his wand, only for Voldemort to stop him. "Enough."

Blaise knelt before Voldemort. "My Lord."

"Crucio." Voldemort put the Cruciatus on the initiate before releasing it a short time later. "You've failed, Zabini. And as I've just demonstrated, I don't take failure lightly."

Blaise wished he'd listened to his mother, and not Marcus Flint, who'd he'd become friends with during the summer. He managed to struggle to his knees. "I apologize for my incompetence, my Lord."

Voldemort debated whether to kill Zabini or not. He'd initially intended to execute all three Death Eaters who'd let Snape go but, after Prewett overcame the Imperius and with Magnus' willingness to face up to his mistake and being prepared to die for it, he'd changed his mind. Snape wasn't worth losing so many Death Eaters for, especially Magnus, who up until now had been an exemplary Death

Eater. He also decided to spare Zabini. He just wished he could be there when the boy had to explain to his fiancée why he'd done what he had. "Zabini, hold out your arm."

Blaise gritted his teeth ready for the pain he knew was coming. Even so, he couldn't stop himself screaming as the mark burned its way into his flesh and his soul. As it ended, he managed to gasp out "Thank you my Lord."

Voldemort then returned his attention to Magnus. "Magnus, Zabini is yours. You will take over from his sponsor and deal with him as you see fit."

Magnus remained kneeling. "I will see to it, my Lord."

Voldemort knew that Magnus wouldn't be going easy on Zabini. "Now go; both of you."

Magnus pulled Zabini to his feet and the two of them left the room.

Voldemort turned to the Order. "You may all also leave except for Praeses."

"Take off your mask." Voldemort ordered before sitting down and facing Remus. "I have to admit to having had some doubts about your loyalty in the past, Remus."

Remus felt himself suddenly feeling extremely uncomfortable. "I am your faithful servant, my Lord."

"I know you are now." Voldemort held out his hand for Remus' mask. "But I'm also aware that you originally only joined me on Dumbledore's orders."

Caught unawares, Remus let his surprise show. "How did you find out?"

"Lamia is Dumbledore's confidante." Voldemort informed him.

Remus was confused. "And yet you still let me live."

“At first it was so that you could pass on false information to Dumbledore.” Voldemort informed him. “Then Lamia told me that after a very short amount of time, your information to Dumbledore had trickled to insignificant details; nothing that would help him. Why was that?”

“May I speak freely, my Lord?” Remus didn’t want to be punished for offending Voldemort and decided to take precautions before he did so.

“You may.” Voldemort was interested in what Remus had to say.

“I stopped because after you discovered I was a werewolf and punished me for it, I went to Dumbledore for help. I begged him to assist me freeing myself but he refused.” Remus interwove lies with some of the truth. “It was then that I saw him for what he was. Not someone who fought for the greater good but someone who used others for their own agenda.”

“As do I.” Voldemort pointed out. “What makes me so different?”

“Unlike Dumbledore, you’ve never tried to deceive me about what you are or what you want to achieve.” Remus hoped he wasn’t signing his own death warrant with his blatant honesty. “While I don’t agree with killing Muggles, I do, however, believe in your goals of removing them from our society.”

“But you were married to a Muggle yourself.” Voldemort was surprised at how open Remus was being.

“Was married.” Remus reminded him. “Dumbledore forced me into marrying her. I didn’t even know it until I managed to overcome the oath of allegiance Dumbledore had made me swear to him.”

Alice had, of course, already informed Voldemort of why Remus had married Nia. “In light of your honesty, I’m going to be equally candid. I have an overwhelming dislike of Muggles. As a boy I grew up in an orphanage where, because I was different, I was persecuted not only by the children there, but by those that ran the orphanage as well.”

"I am sorry to hear that, my Lord." Listening to Voldemort, Remus felt like a little Alice and wondered if he'd strayed down the wrong rabbit hole.

"It does not matter now." Voldemort indicated that Remus should sit down as a chair appeared beside him. "I expect you wonder why I'm telling you all this?"

"I am, my Lord." Remus sat down.

Voldemort decided to let him on his decision. "How you dealt with your son today was your final test. I've decided that you will take your place as Sirius' equal. As befitting someone of your standing, you may of course, choose an apprentice of your own. Unfortunately Jamie, who I understand you've been training in my stead, is not available, as I eventually intend for him to take his place as my own apprentice."

Remus hid his shock. "Thank you my Lord."

"Do you have anyone in mind you might like to take up the position?" Voldemort passed him back his mask.

"I do, my Lord." Remus told him. "Orion Black."

"He's a little young at the moment, don't you think?" Voldemort asked. "Are you sure you wouldn't rather choose someone else?"

"I'm willing to wait until he is fifteen and of age, my Lord..." Remus knew that Sirius was already planning to initiate his son at fourteen, and hoped to buy Orion a little more time. "...as I'd prefer to take someone of Orion's caliber than to take what's currently on offer."

"Very well." Voldemort told him. "I'll let you tell Sirius yourself."

Something was bothering Remus. "My Lord, may I ask a question?"

"Go ahead." Voldemort was feeling quite generous.

Remus wondered what Voldemort was playing at being so honest with him. "Why did you make me a Lieutenant knowing I'd intended to betray you before?"

"I knew your alliance had changed and I needed a reliable bodyguard. While you'll never be up to Sirius' standard at dueling, there's no getting away from the fact that you're skilled at it but with your werewolf abilities, you have an advantage no-one else does." Voldemort smiled. "Also, you're extremely knowledgeable. It shouldn't come as a shock that I might actually enjoy an intelligent conversation."

Remus was surprised to find that Dae's assessment of why Voldemort had promoted him was correct. "Thank you for answering the question, my Lord."

"I haven't ever regretted my decision." Voldemort admitted. "Since you so obviously switched your alliances, the only time I had any real reason to doubt your loyalty was when Sirius had told me you'd been reluctant about Harry becoming his apprentice. He did, however, inform me of why that was."

"I'll admit that I didn't want Harry to kill anyone but he's proved he's more than competent." Remus then grimaced. "Except for his mistake today."

"For which he was punished at your hand." Voldemort reminded him.

Remus wondered how Harry was. "I treated him no differently that I would have treated anyone else."

"Which is why I decided you were worthy to finally become my adviser." Voldemort stood up, watching as Remus did the same. "You will move to the third floor and take the rooms next to Sirius. You will also be granted the same apparition rights he and Harry currently hold."

Remus bowed. "Thank you, my Lord."

"I'll let you return home now, Remus." Voldemort dismissed Remus. "I'm sure Harry will be in need of your assistance."

"Thank you, my Lord." Remus then replaced his mask and hurriedly left, rushing to the main apparition point and apparating out to Grimmauld Square.

Harry started at the crack in the hallway, and looked up to see Sirius standing there. "Sirius, where's Dad?"

"It's me, Harry." Remus realized that Harry hadn't recognized him because of the change that Voldemort had made to his mask.

Harry relaxed. "I managed to walk across the room and apparate out but when I got back here, my legs refused to support me anymore and I collapsed."

"I'm not surprised after what I did to you." Remus scooped Harry up before carrying him over to him Harry gently on the sofa in the sitting room. "I'm so sorry."

"It's not your fault." Harry tried to smile and winced. "You did what you had to do. I would have done the same."

"Let me heal your face and get you a potion for that curse." Remus pulled off his mask and healed Harry's face before hurrying into his study, to return a few minutes later. "Drink this."

Harry swallowed the potion. "Dad, what happened to your mask?"

"The Dark Lord has decided to promote me one last time." Remus still wondered whether Voldemort had an ulterior motive he wasn't revealing. "Like Sirius, I can now choose an apprentice of my own."

"Have you decided on anyone yet?" Harry wondered who would have to go what he'd gone through.

"I have. I've chosen Orion." Remus held up his hand at Harry's distressed look. "I'll explain later. Right now the girls are alone, and I need to get them." Remus kissed Harry on the forehead. "I'll be back

as soon as I can." Remus then apparated to the outskirts of Diagon Alley, which was now crawling with Aurors who were surveying the burning buildings. Kingsley Shacklebolt walked up to him. "Remus, what are you doing here?"

"The girls were shopping here with Harry when they got separated." Remus told him. "I'm trying to find them."

"I haven't seen them." Kingsley looked worried. "I'll let the others know they're missing."

Remus thanked him. "They're pretty au fait with the Muggle world, so I'm going to look for them outside the Cauldron."

Kingsley had forgotten that the children's mother was a Muggle. "Let me know if you come across them."

Remus promised he would and hurried off through the Leaky Cauldron and into the Muggle side. Once inside the department store, he used his senses of smell and hearing to track the girls down. He found them sitting in a booth drinking hot chocolate. Scarlett saw him first and let out a delighted scream. "Daddy."

Auri and Georgie almost knocked over their drinks in their hurry to get to Remus. "Is Harry alright?"

"He's at home." Remus bent down so that Scarlett could climb onto his back before holding out his hands to the two older girls. "Let's go."

On arriving back at Diagon Alley, Auri let out a gasp. "What happened?"

Kingsley spotted the group. "I see you found them."

Remus let go of their hands to put an arm around each of his older daughters. "The girls managed to get out of the Cauldron and were in the Department Store next door. I'd like to stay and help Kingsley, but this is no place for them."

Kingsley nodded. "I understand."

Remus then apparated out with all three girls into Grimmauld Square. The minute he arrived, Auri broke away from her Dad to dash over to where Harry was lying on the sofa, still shaking slightly. "What happened to you?"

"Leave Harry be." Remus told her. "Go sit down."

"Dad, what really happened today?" Auri wasn't going to back off. "I know you must have known something was going to happen."

Harry looked at Remus and nodded. "You may as well tell her."

"I could obliviate her." Remus told him.

Auri let out a shriek of annoyance. "I don't want to be obliviated. I want to know what's going on. Mom's going to know we were in Diagon Alley. How will you explain it to her if we all don't remember?"

"Quite simply actually." Remus swung round with his wand aimed at Scarlett. "Oblivate."

Scarlett swayed on her feet and Remus steadied her. "The shopping trip has been cancelled. There's been an accident in Diagon Alley."

Coming round properly, Scarlett looked up at her father. "When are we going shopping, Daddy?"

"Don't you remember me telling you? There's been an accident in Diagon Alley." Remus told her. "I'll take you shopping in Muggle London tomorrow instead."

Scarlett was satisfied with Remus' explanation. "I forgot. Can I go and see Cassie then?"

Deciding it would be better to get her out of the way, Remus picked her up and apparated into Sirius' house to find Sirius playing a game with Anna and Orion; Remus was surprised to see that Sirius had returned already. "Where's everyone else?"

"Lily and Cassie are in the kitchen and Jamie's in the bath." Sirius informed him before turning to ruffle his niece's hair. "Hi Scarlett."

Scarlett grinned at her uncle. "Hi Uncle Sirius. Can I see Cassie please? Daddy said that there'd been an accident at Diagon Alley and we can't go shopping today like we planned to."

Sirius nodded towards the kitchen. "Cassie's helping your Aunt Lily make cookies. I'm sure they'd like your help."

Remus put his daughter down and Scarlett ran off. Remus turned to Sirius. "Can we have a word?"

Sirius led the way into his study. "What is it?"

"Our Master has granted me an apprentice." Remus decided to be upfront. "I've chosen your son."

"Orion?" Sirius was surprised.

Remus nodded. "I'd rather wait for him to turn fifteen than to take anyone else."

"You don't want him sooner?" Sirius asked.

Remus shook his head. "His power will be more focused if I wait until then."

Sirius was a little frustrated that Remus wouldn't take him sooner. "I'm disappointed you want to wait so long but I understand."

Remus pulled a face. "I'm not sure Lily will."

Sirius knew exactly how Lily would take it. "I'll tell her. But don't be surprised if she turns up on your doorstep when I do."

"Did you tell her about the Dark Lord's request?" Remus asked casually.

Sirius shook his head. "I was planning to tonight, after the children go to bed. The last few days have been hectic with finalizing the plans for the Diagon Alley attack." Sirius frowned. "Why did you take so long to appear today?"

"I had the girls with me." Remus told him. "I couldn't leave them in the middle of Diagon Alley on their own."

"Not an excuse you could really go to the Dark Lord with though, is it?" Sirius knew, however, that he would have done the same. "Have you obliviated them?"

Remus nodded. "They all think that they'd just arrived at Grimmauld Square when I called the trip off. Harry's sitting with them now."

"Is Harry alright?" Sirius was aware from dueling with Remus how painful his Cruciatus could be.

"Not exactly, but he should be alright by tomorrow." Remus wanted Sirius to think that Harry was far worse than he actually was. "Do you have a message for him?"

"Unless I need him, tell him I'll see him here on Boxing Day. I think he's old enough to join us adults for a drink now." Sirius had invited Remus and his children around to dinner.

Remus disagreed but didn't say so. "Thanks and I'll see you then. By the way, Dudley, Georgia and Scarlett won't be here. They're going out to dinner with Grim and Nia on that night."

"How come?" Sirius asked.

"We're going to swap on New Year's Eve. Harry and Auri will have dinner with Nia then and I'll take the rest of the rabble." Remus and Nia had both wanted to see their children at the same time and had compromised. Nia had invited Remus to spend both days with them but because of Sirius' invitation, he'd had to decline. Wanting to get back, Remus forced himself to hold out his hand. "I really don't want to leave Harry alone for too long. Merry Christmas, Sirius."

Sirius shook Remus' hand. "Merry Christmas, Remus."

Remus then headed back into the hallway and apparated home. He had some explaining to do.

On getting back, he found Harry still lying down. "How are you feeling now?"

Harry could hear the concern in Remus' voice. "Sore but not as bad as I was. Did you overpower the curse?"

Remus had. "As much as I could; I think it's so bad because of the length of time I held it on you."

"Held what on him, Dad?" Auri was frustrated. Harry had refused to tell her anything.

"The Cruciatus." Harry told his sister.

Georgie laughed. "Yeah right, Harry."

Remus looked seriously at her. "He's not joking, Georgie." He cringed as Georgie took a frightened step away from him. "Georgie, sit down."

Harry sat up and called out to his sisters. "Both of you come and sit with me."

Just as Auri slipped under Harry's left arm and Georgie under his right, the fireplace flared up and Severus stepped through.

Harry felt relief flood through him. "Severus, are you alright?"

Severus nodded. "I'm fine." He then looked questioningly at the girls.

Remus indicated he should sit down. "They were with me and Harry when we were called."

Auri scowled. "Will somebody please tell me what is going on?"

Remus looked over at Severus. "Can you please give tell them what I can't, and then I'll take it from there."

A short time later the two girls were reeling. As Remus finished speaking, Auri got up and headed for the fireplace, blind rage at what Sirius had done to her brother almost consuming her. "I'll be back soon."

Remus got up. "Where are you going?"

"To kill Uncle Sirius." Auri stepped into the fireplace.

Harry had his wand out before she could throw the floo powder down. "Accio Aurilia."

Auri shot across the room towards Harry, only for Remus to reach out and snag her with his arm. "You're not going to do anything of the sort."

Severus smirked. "Twenty points for Slytherin."

Auri turned on her professor. "I don't think it's funny, Sir."

"Neither do I." Severus admitted. "But you've just joined a long list of people who want Black dead and as I'm at the top of it, I felt it was only fitting to award you for wanting to do the right thing."

"Why are you at the top, Professor?" Auri knew from her Dad that Professor Snape and her Uncle hadn't exactly been good friends at school but she couldn't see that as a reason to kill him.

"He raped my wife." Severus told her bluntly.

Auri paled and started back towards the fireplace, her wand drawn. Remus grabbed her again. "Auri, calm down."

"I can't, Dad." Auri scowled at Severus. "I know why Harry and Dad can't kill him but you could have done it by now. After what he did to your wife, I'm surprised he's still alive."

Severus shook his head. "I can't yet. We're concerned what it will do to Harry if he dies. Your Aunt is afraid that Harry will live but be left soulless if Black was to die."

"But what about what Aunt Lily did to him at Hosgmeade?" Auri pointed out.

"She wasn't thinking." Harry told her. "She just acted in the heat of the moment."

Auri went limp in her Dad's arms and turned her face into his chest. "Dad, I really, really hate him."

"I know, Auri. So do I." Remus comforted his daughter before glancing across at Georgie who was crying into Harry's shoulder, as she'd been doing for most of the conversation. "Georgie, come here."

Georgie wiped her face for the umpteenth time, and shook her head. Unlike her sister, who seemed to be more angry than upset, after what Remus had just told her, Georgie was terrified of her Dad. "I don't want to."

Harry wasn't surprised at Georgie's reaction. He'd felt her stiffen when Remus had told her about himself. He was glad that his Dad had spared his sisters the worst of the story and omitted the details of what had taken place in the cavern. "Dad won't hurt you, Georgie."

Georgie didn't agree. "He hurt you Harry. What if You Know Who tells him to hurt me or any of the others? What then?" Georgie couldn't cope with her world being turned upside down. "It's just too horrible. I can't deal with this. I wish you'd never told me."

Remus understood and moved Auri away from him so he could look at her. "I'm going to have to obliviate Georgie. What about you?"

"No way." Unlike her sister, Auri had no wish to forget what she'd been told.

"Auri, when I obliviate Georgie, I'm going to tell her about the incident at Diagon Alley and she's going to believe that you'd been told when

you arrived here. I then took Scarlett to Sirius' home, and Georgie fell asleep. I'm going to suggest to her that she'd like to leave." Remus then let go of Auri and knelt in front of Georgie, feeling his heart sink as she recoiled from him. "Are you sure, Georgie?"

Georgie couldn't look at her Dad. "Please, just do it."

Not giving Georgie a chance to say anything else, Remus unholstered his wand. "Obliviate."

Auri watched Remus tell his sister exactly what he'd told her would, before Georgie sleepily opened her eyes. Auri laughed at her. "Wake up sleepyhead."

"What happened?" Georgie stretched. "My face feels sticky."

"You had a bad dream and were crying." Harry told her.

Georgie shook her head as she tried to focus. "I remember Dad telling us that something had happened at Diagon Alley, and that's the last thing I remember."

"Perhaps you should try sleeping at night." Auri told her sister.

Georgie looked round. "Where's Scarlett?"

"Don't you remember?" Remus asked quietly. "She wanted to see Cassie."

Suddenly feeling the need to go home, Georgie got up. "As we're not going to Diagon Alley, can I go home? I'd like to spend the day with Mum."

Remus held out his arm; glad that Georgie obviously didn't remember anything as she grabbed on tight. "I'll be back in a minute."

As soon as they'd gone Auri turned on her brother. "I wish you'd told me sooner."

Harry shook his head. "Dad wouldn't have even told you now except for the fact that you were caught up in all of this." He then looked assessingly at his sister. "Why didn't you get so upset at Dad for what he did to me?"

Auri shrugged. "I know Dad would never deliberately hurt you unless there was a good reason. I'd say if punishing you means eventually killing You Know Who and Uncle Sirius, then it's a very good reason."

"It is a very good reason." Harry sighed. "We still haven't told you everything Auri."

"Like what?" Auri twisted so that she could lie back against her brother.

"I had to kill a man, Auri." Harry wanted to be totally honest with his sister; Remus hadn't told her as he'd felt it wasn't his place to do so.

"Who?" Auri sounded more interested than bothered.

"Another Death Eater." Harry then told her about himself and Jamie.

"Harry, I know you wouldn't have done it if you'd had any other choice." Auri swung round and looked at her brother. "I'm not Georgie. I'm not going to have a meltdown just because you've done something awful."

Harry let out a deep breath. "Thank you."

Auri hugged him. "Anytime."

Severus looked at the time. "I hate to break up the touching moment but I need to get home. Virginie will be worrying if she's heard about Diagon Alley."

Remus walked back into the room. "Be careful Severus. Next time you might not be able to elude your guards so easily, particularly as the Dark Lord knows you're an animagus now."

Severus snorted. "If all of the Dark Lord's men are as incompetent as that lot, then I really won't have much to worry about."

"They're not, and I doubt you'll get away with the same trick twice. You got lucky today." Remus told him. "And Ginny Prewett and Harry paid the price for it."

Severus looked sober. "I'm sorry about Harry. But Prewett knew what she was getting into. She went into this willingly."

"She still didn't deserve to go through that." Remus didn't like her but he hadn't enjoyed seeing Ginny suffer like that.

Auri disagreed. "She tried to kill Hermione, Dad. I don't care that she almost died."

"That's a little harsh, don't you think?" Remus asked his daughter.

"Dad, she wanted to join that nutter. You said yourself Jamie hardly had to coerce her into joining." Auri pointed out. "Slytherin would be a much nicer place without her nasty little face."

Remus realized that Auri was taking her anger about Sirius out on Ginny. "That's enough please, Auri. Think about her family. It wouldn't have exactly been a merry Christmas for them if she'd died, now would it?"

Auri hadn't thought about Ginny's family. "Sorry, Dad."

Severus went towards the fireplace only to stop as he thought of something. "Miss. Lupin is going to need some protection."

Realizing what Severus meant, Harry slipped a ring off his finger. "Auri, I want you to wear this."

Auri took the ring and turned it over in her hand. "What is it?"

"A ring that will protect you against anyone who tries to perform Legilimency on you. I don't really need it now, as I've managed to

improve my Occlumency to the stage where I can cope without it.” Harry told her.

“Err, Harry?” Auri asked as she slipped on the ring. “What are Legilimency and Occlumency?”

Harry explained it to her. “If you don’t wear the ring anyone could easily skim your mind for your thoughts, including Sirius.”

Auri felt a shiver run through her at the thought of her Uncle rummaging through her thoughts. “Thanks.”

Severus grabbed a handful of floo powder. “Have a Merry Christmas if you can.”

“Thanks, Severus.” Remus shook Severus’ empty hand. “We intend to. Give my love to Virginie.”

While Remus saw Severus off, Auri returned to lolling all over her brother. “Can I learn to become an animagus?”

Harry knew he should have known better than to tell her about that. “No. You’re too young.”

“But you were a third year when you started practicing.” Auri then displayed the cunning that had gotten her into Slytherin in the first place. “And if I’m in danger, I might need it. It would have come in handy today.”

Remus had heard the conversation from the hallway. “We’ve got enough going on already, Auri. When all this is over, I’ll ask Harry to help you.”

“But Dad...” Auri began to whine.

“No, Auri.” Remus refused. “Harry has enough going on and I can’t teach you.”

“What about Aunt Lily then?” Auri wasn’t ready to give up.

"Don't you think she's got enough to cope with?" Harry backed his Dad up.

Auri knew that she wasn't going to win. "Okay, but you've got to promise to teach me when all this is over."

"I promise." Harry hugged his sister. "Now I think it's time we got something to eat."

The Next Morning

Remus had just finished reading the newspaper when Lily stepped through the fireplace. Getting up he made his way across to greet her, only to come to a halt when she raised her hand and slapped him across the face. "You bastard."

"I take it Sirius told you about Orion then." Remus gently grabbed Lily's wrists as she went to slap him again.

Lily scowled at him. "How could you Remus?"

"I had to." Remus let go of her wrists, hoping she wouldn't hit him again before he'd explained. "Come with me."

Reluctantly Lily followed him into his study. "You'd better have a damn good reason for choosing my son."

"I do. I know Sirius told you he'd planned for Orion to serve his Master." Remus informed her. "What I doubt he told you is that he was intending to induct Orion at fourteen, Lily."

Lily gasped. "But he's almost thirteen now."

"I know." Remus leant back against his desk. "Which is why I chose him as my apprentice when the Dark Lord offered me one. I also stipulated that he'd be of age, which in his case would be fifteen."

Lily felt awful for doubting him. "I'm sorry, Rem. I should have trusted you."

“Yes, you should have, Lily.” Remus walked over to her and took her hand. “By the time Orion reaches fifteen, hopefully the Dark Lord will be dead, and he’ll never have to step foot into Villa Laurifer.”

Lily slipped her arms around Remus’ waist and leant her head against his chest. “Why didn’t I just kill Sirius when I had the chance?”

“Because you’d never be able to live with yourself, and there’s every chance you would have condemned Harry to death as well.” Remus gently stroked her hair. “Lily, believe me. It’s one thing to take a life in a fight, but it’s totally another to cold bloodedly stand there and kill someone.”

Lily knew he was right. “He’s made such a mess of things.”

“I know. Let’s forget about Sirius for a moment.” Remus tilted Lily’s chin up. “I’ve missed you.”

“I’ve missed you as well.” Lily stood on her tiptoes and kissed Remus, moaning slightly as he covered her lips with his own.

Hearing voices in the hallway, Remus gently pushed Lily away. “Someone just came into the hallway.”

A knock sounded on the door, and Remus told whoever it was to come in.

Auri pushed open the door. “I just wanted to let you know that Georgie and Scarlett are outside.” She shut the door and threw herself at Lily. “Aunt Lily, I’m really sorry.”

Lily looked over her niece’s head. “She knows?”

“I’ll explain later.” Remus told her. “After yesterday, I’ve promised to take the girls into Muggle London shopping.”

Lily’s face lit up. “Let me get my lot and we’ll come as well, if that’s okay.”

Remus agreed it was. "We can wait. Harry should hopefully be back soon."

Lily's face darkened. "I can't believe Sirius dragged him out of bed this morning to practice."

"I can." Remus hadn't been pleased either when Harry had woke him up to get his mask out of storage. "Has Sirius asked you about the job yet?"

Lily nodded. "I refused pointblank."

"How did he take it?" Remus asked quietly.

"Not well." Lily shivered.

"Did he threaten you?" Remus could feel himself getting angry.

"He threatened Harry instead." Lily admitted.

"And Harry's with him now?" Remus ground out.

Lily put a hand on Remus' arm. "When he threatened Harry, I told Sirius I'd think about it but that even if I said yes, I wouldn't be doing anything until I'd completed the year at Hogwarts."

Remus relaxed slightly. "How did he take that?"

"He seemed to accept it." Lily shivered. "I don't trust him though."

Suddenly a crack sounded behind Remus and a bloody Harry appeared. Auri let out a small yelp. "Harry, you're bleeding."

Remus scowled at Lily before checking on his son. "What did he do to you?"

"We were dueling and I got in the way of a blood bursting curse." Harry winced as he spoke, blood flowing freely from his nose. "Normally he repairs his damage but he's obviously decided that as you know about him, he doesn't need to anymore."

Lily pulled out her wand and carefully healed Harry's nose. "I'm sorry Harry. This is my fault."

"He told me you'd refused." Harry felt better. "He's seriously pissed at you, Maman."

"I expect he is." Lily wondered if she'd made the wrong decision.

Harry grinned. "The Dark Lord wasn't happy either, and blamed Sirius for your lack of co-operation."

Lily was curious. "How do you know that?"

"I was there." Harry didn't tell Lily that Sirius had then taken it out on him. "When Sirius told him you'd consider it after the school year ended, the Dark Lord became angry. He said something about Sirius not being able to control his own wife." Harry then grimaced. "Unfortunately the Dark Lord told Sirius that you will be working for him by Easter whether you like it or not."

Lily sighed. "I'm surprised he gave me that long."

Even though she was curious as to what the Dark Lord wanted her Aunt to do, at that moment Auri wanted to go out more. She therefore coughed politely, and interrupted. "I'm fed up of talking about them gits. I want to go to shopping."

"Language young lady." Remus berated his daughter while privately agreeing with her declaration. "Harry, do you feel up to going shopping?"

Harry nodded. "I've still got gifts to buy, so I'm going to come along. I just need to shower and change first. I'll apparate directly upstairs as I take it that the girls are outside; I don't want them seeing me like this."

Auri nodded. "They are. I'll go back out and wait for you."

Lily followed her niece out. Remus apparated directly into Harry's bedroom and waited for his son to come out of the shower. When he did, Remus grimaced. "I knew he'd done more to you than you said. Come here."

Harry limped over to his Dad and waited patiently while Remus healed the remainder of his injuries. "Don't tell Maman, Dad."

"Harry, she needs to know." Remus argued.

Harry disagreed. "The Dark Lord's given her until Easter. Why bother upsetting things? Sirius has already taken it out on me for what the Dark Lord did to him."

Remus was shocked. "The Dark Lord punished Sirius?"

Harry nodded. "He actually put him under the Cruciatus. I don't think he was expecting Lily to turn down the offer."

Remus whistled. "I'm surprised to hear that. Sirius can normally get away with things no-one else can. If anything, I'd have pegged them as friends."

"I don't think the Dark Lord was feeling too friendly towards Sirius this morning." Harry grinned. "It was nice to see him get a taste of his own medicine."

"How vicious was he afterwards?" Remus wondered if Harry's injuries had been worse than he'd seen.

"Very but I'm getting proficient at holding my own. I even got a few curses in myself." Harry smirked as he remembered the surprised look on Sirius' face as he'd flown through the air.

"Don't get too overconfident." Remus warned.

"I know better than that." Harry finished pulling on his clothes. "We'd better go and meet the girls."

Meanwhile, Lily apparated home to find Sirius waiting for her. "Where were you?"

"I went to have it out with Remus, if you must know." Lily snapped.

"Come into the library." Sirius ordered.

Knowing what was coming, Lily dutifully followed him into the library and closed the doors behind her. "What is it?"

"I want you to back off from bothering Remus." Sirius leant against one of the desks that littered the lower floor of the library. "Lily, Orion is being offered a great opportunity."

"You'll forgive me if I don't see it that way." Lily stood with her arms crossed over her chest. "Sirius, I don't want my son to become a killer."

"I've already told you that Orion will follow in my footsteps no matter what you want." Sirius wished Lily would see reason. "Lily, have you thought any more about the job offer the Dark Lord made to you?"

"I thought I made it quite clear where I stood on that." Lily told him.

"I underwent the Cruciatus this morning because of your refusal." Sirius informed his wife.

Lily looked apologetic. "I'm sorry."

"I can't allow you to decline again." Sirius's tone didn't brook any refusal. "You're to begin working for the Dark Lord at Easter."

"And if I don't?" Lily knew she should have known better than to bait Sirius but she'd had enough. "What are you going to do, Sirius? Are you going to torture me like you've been doing to my son?"

Sirius walked up to her and grabbed her wrists pulling her towards him. "Lily, you will do as I say. If you don't, Harry will pay the price not you. For every refusal you make from now on, he'll be the one who suffers for it."

Lily tried to pull free but Sirius' grip was too tight. "You're hurting me."

Sirius immediately let go of her. "Lily, I'm sorry. I love you and I don't like upsetting you, but please don't keep on refusing me. I don't want to have to hurt Harry again."

Lily frowned. "Again?"

"Harry was there this morning when my Master came for your answer." Sirius knew he didn't have to say much more than as Lily's face dropped. "Please try and understand."

Lily hid her disgust at her husband. "Oh I understand alright, Sirius. You can tell your precious Master I'll work for him at Easter. Just leave Harry alone."

Sirius smiled and ran a hand through Lily's hair. "See, that wasn't so hard, was it?" Sirius pulled her close. "Lily, I just want what's best for everyone."

Lily stiffened as Sirius kissed her. Sirius frowned. "What's wrong, Lily?"

Lily couldn't believe him. "I'm feeling upset about Harry. What do you think is wrong?"

"There'd have been nothing to get upset about if you'd simply just agreed in the first place." Sirius pointed out. He pulled her even closer, sliding his hand down to cup her bottom. "Lily, I don't like it like when we argue like this."

"But we're not arguing Sirius." Lily said quietly. "You're telling me what to do, and I'm going along with it."

"Lily, don't be like that. Everything will be fine now." Sirius gently nuzzled Lily's neck as he spoke. "You've said yes; I'll back off from Harry, and we can enjoy Christmas."

Lily took a deep shuddering breath as she struggled to control the revulsion she was feeling. She pulled away. "I'm sorry Sirius but I really must get the children ready. Auri and the others were almost bursting to get out when I left."

"I thought you said you went round to have it out with Remus." Sirius pointed out.

"I did but when I got there the girls were waiting to go out shopping in Muggle London and begged me to come as well." Lily hoped Sirius believed her. "I might be angry with Remus but I'm not going to take it out on my nieces."

Sirius wondered if he should offer to go with them but then decided against it. He hated Muggle London. "Are you taking all of the children?"

Lily nodded and pulled open the doors. "I don't know what time I'll be back."

"I'm probably going to go to Villa Laurifer anyway, so don't hurry back on my account." Sirius was glad that he had good news to pass onto his Master. "And, Lily?"

Lily turned round. "Yes?"

"I love you." Sirius smiled.

"I know you do." Lily walked off without giving him a second glance.

Sirius knew that it could have gone a lot better and that his Master was right about his being too soft on Lily, but next to his children, he loved Lily more anything else in the world.

Villa Laurifer

Sirius apparated directly into his rooms before making his way out and along the corridor. He gently tapped on the last set of double doors and entered when beckoned.

Voldemort was alone. "Come in and take off your mask."

Sirius did as he was told. "Thank you, my Lord."

"I'm sorry about this morning." Voldemort sat down. "I don't like having to punish you, Sirius."

"I know, my Lord." Sirius didn't like it either.

"How badly did you injure Harry?" Voldemort knew that Sirius would have taken it out on the boy.

"Not that badly." Sirius shrugged. "Harry's more than capable of dealing with whatever punishment he's meted out."

"I noticed that yesterday." Voldemort indicated that Sirius, who until then had remained standing, should also sit down.

Sirius sat down and decided to pass on the good news. "Lily has agreed to work for you from Easter as you wished."

Voldemort was surprised. Even though he'd demanded Lily do the work, he'd still expected her to refuse. "What made her change her mind?"

"A little gentle persuasion." Sirius informed him. "I don't think she was particularly keen on the idea of Harry undergoing any more punishment on her behalf. Will Easter be soon enough?"

Voldemort nodded. "I don't intend to take the Ministry until August when most of its employees are on annual leave."

"Do you think they'll still take the leave after the attack on Diagon Alley?" Sirius asked.

"I do. After the next mission, I'm going to tread softly. You know what the Ministry's like. After a few months of inaction, they'll think I've gone to ground." Voldemort smirked. "Then I'll hit them."

“What about the Hallows and Dumbledore?” Sirius knew that Voldemort already had two out of the three Hallows.

“I know from Dumbledore’s notes that the wand is in the Ministry somewhere; more than likely in the Department of Mysteries. I’ve waited this long, a few more months won’t make any difference.” Voldemort informed him. “As for Dumbledore, I’ve decided to deal with him myself. Now his horcrux has been destroyed, he’s vulnerable.”

“Unlike you.” Sirius smirked.

“I know I can rely on the person I entrusted with mine wholeheartedly.” Voldemort held out his hand.

Sirius pulled off his wedding band and handed it over. “It’s such a simple idea really, and certainly not somewhere anyone would look.”

“And it’s not as if it’s going to corrupt you, is it?” Voldemort laughed as he turned the ring over in his hand.

Sirius was well past that stage and knew it. “Obviously not.”

Voldemort passed the wedding band back over. “Let’s discuss my plans for Dumbledore.”

NEXT CHAPTER: Christmas and New Year; Harry returns to the Chamber of Secrets.

Chapter 60: Return to the Chamber

Boxing Day

Auri felt her stomach knot up at the thought of facing Sirius.

Remus watched Harry disappear from the fireplace before turning to his daughter. "Are you going to be alright?"

"I think so." Auri took a deep breath, and grinned at her Dad. "Don't worry; I'm not going to pull my wand on him or anything."

Remus wasn't so sure. "Please display some of the cunning I'm sure got you into Slytherin rather than the hotheadedness that should have gotten you into Gryffindor."

Auri scowled. "I like being a Slytherin."

"I know you do." Remus didn't care what houses his children were in. "Now smile and get into the fireplace for me."

Auri climbed into the fireplace, plastered on the falsest smile Remus had ever seen and promptly disappeared. When she tumbled out of the other side she was surprised to find Draco waiting her. "Draco, what are you doing here?"

"Having dinner with Aunt Lily, just like you." Draco held out a hand to Auri. "Come on, the others are in the sitting room. Mum and Lizzie are here."

Auri's face lit up at the thought of seeing Draco's little sister. "Has she said anything else yet?"

Draco's face split into a goofy grin. "She calls me Daco".

Sirius walked out into the hallway. "I wondered what was taking you."

Auri smiled politely. "Hello Uncle Sirius."

“Hi Auri.” Sirius grinned at her. “Come in. Lily’s been baking all morning.”

Not letting go of Draco’s hand, Auri followed Sirius into the sitting room. “Hi Aunt Lily, Mr. and Mrs. Delaney.”

“Auri, how lovely to see you again.” Narcissa got up and hugged Auri. “Come and sit by me. You can help me amuse Lizzie.”

Auri followed Narcissa over to the corner of the room where a small golden-haired toddler was playing with her bricks. She looked shyly up at Auri. Narcissa bent down. “Lizzie, do you remember Auri?”

“Ri?” The toddler obviously didn’t. “Pay me”.

Auri sat down and dutifully began to play with the little girl.

Draco watched Auri for a few moments before noticing Remus enter the room, only for Sirius to lead him out again.

Remus had hoped to get through the day without any talk of Voldemort but as Sirius led him into his study, he knew that his hopes were about to be dashed. “What’s up?”

“It’s just a quick one. We’ve got a meeting tomorrow night at 10 with our Master to discuss Dumbledore.” Sirius informed him.

“I’ll be there.” Remus lifted an eyebrow when Sirius showed no signs of wanting to leave. “Is there anything else?”

Sirius sighed. “I’m having problems with Lily.”

Remus tried to appear concerned. “What sort of problems?”

“Ever since I told her about you and Orion, she’s been distant.” Sirius admitted. “I’ve tried to be patient but it’s really beginning to irritate me.”

"Give her some time, Sirius." Remus told him. "If you'll remember, I wasn't particularly happy about Harry joining, and I'm already a Death Eater. Lily isn't. She'll come round."

For the first time in his marriage, Sirius found himself unsure of his relationship with his wife. "Do you really think so?"

"Of course." Remus grinned. "She's speaking to me again."

"That's because you took her and the kids shopping." Suddenly Sirius' face brightened. "Why didn't I think of that?"

"Think of what?" Remus didn't like the happy smile Sirius was suddenly wearing.

"I'm going to take Lily away to Paris for a few nights before she returns to Hogwarts." Sirius beamed at his idea.

Remus felt dismayed at the thought of Sirius being alone with Lily. "What about the children?"

"I'll ask Narcy to take care of the girls." Sirius looked hopefully at Remus. "Would you take Jamie and Orion?"

Not wanting to appear churlish, Remus reluctantly agreed. "Of course. When are you planning to go?"

"Obviously I can't go tomorrow, so I'll arrange to leave the day after. We'll return on New Year's Eve." Sirius clapped Remus on the back. "I'm so glad I spoke to you."

"Glad I could help." Remus knew Lily wasn't going to be happy. "Let's get back."

The day progressed smoothly and soon everyone was stuffed full of Lily's cooking. Draco stood up. "I'm going to stretch my legs. If I don't move soon I'm going to fall asleep." He walked over to Auri. "Would you like to come for a walk around the conservatory?"

“Won’t it be cold?” Even as she asked, Auri knew that she was going to go even if was ten below zero in there.

Lily shook her head. “It’s always kept warm.”

Remus frowned as he watched Auri disappear with Draco. Narcissa smiled at him. “Don’t worry Remus. They’re not going to get up to anything in the middle of the conservatory.”

Remus relaxed. “I was a bit obvious, wasn’t I?”

Narcissa laughed. “Just a little.” She turned to Sirius and Lily. “I’m sorry, but we’ve really got to be getting home.” She passed Lizzie to her father to hug them both.

Craig cradled his small daughter, being careful not to wake her. “I don’t think Lizzie’s used to all of this excitement.”

Sirius smiled softly at the tiny girl. “She certainly was excited. I’m just glad that that was a toy wand we gave her.”

Narcissa laughed. “Hearing my daughter yelling ‘dupify’ and aiming her wand at you was quite amusing.”

Craig shook hands with Sirius. “Sorry, mate but we really must go.”

Remus watched as the family apparated out. “Is Draco not going with them?”

Lily shook her head. “He’s staying here tonight.” She grinned. “He only asked if he could after finding out that Auri would be coming this evening.”

Remus scowled. “Perhaps I’d better walk off some of that food myself.”

Harry put a hand on Remus’ arm. “Dad, Draco knows I’d kick his ass if he did anything to upset Auri.”

Remus laughed at himself. "I really am being the heavy-handed father, aren't I?"

"Yep." Harry told him before helping himself to another biscuit. "These are really good."

Lily beamed. "I'm glad you like them."

Out in the conservatory Draco led Auri over to a bench. "Auri, I've got something to ask."

Auri felt excited. "What is it?"

"Would you like to be my girlfriend?" Draco waited for the eruption.

Auri squealed and threw herself at him. "You know I would."

Draco laughed. "I knew you'd squeal."

Auri suddenly became serious. "Why did you wait this long to ask me? You knew I'd say yes."

"I was going to wait until your next birthday." Draco admitted. "But when I watched you playing with Lizzie today, I realized that I didn't want to."

"You do know that you're going to get some stick at school, don't you?" Auri asked him.

"I know that. I'm going to turn sixteen while you're still only thirteen, which is why I originally decided to wait until your birthday." Draco informed her.

Auri laughed. "I don't mean about the age difference. I mean because you'll be dating a nasty Slytherin."

Draco shrugged. "I don't care what people say. I'd still date you even if you were a Hufflepuff."

Auri shuddered. "I've got nothing against it but the thought being a Hufflepuff makes me cringe. I love my house and I'd have gone to any lengths to get in it."

"Which is why I think the hat put you in Slytherin." Draco stood up. "Let's head back inside."

"Aren't you supposed to kiss me now?" Auri asked cheekily.

Draco shook his head. "With your Dad just next door, I think not."

Auri giggled. "He won't do anything."

"I'm not willing to take the chance." Draco held out his arm. "Come on."

Draco and Auri headed back in. Remus glanced over as they came in through the door. "Did you enjoy your walk?"

"Yes, thanks." Auri plonked herself down. "Where's Mr and Mrs Delaney?"

"Lizzie needed her bed." Lily explained. "Why don't we all go sit down in the family room? It's a little more comfortable than the sitting room."

Sirius followed everyone in. He'd hoped to talk to Jamie about himself while Harry and Remus were there but with Auri and Draco also there he couldn't. He'd hoped that Auri wouldn't have been able to make it and that Draco would have gone home. Resigning himself to putting it off for a little longer, he sat down next to Lily and watched as everyone began to play charades.

New Year's Eve

Remus laughed at Scarlett's joke. "I hope you're learning more than just that at school."

"Of course I am Daddy." Scarlett span round as she heard the fireplace flare up. "I wonder who that is."

A grim faced Hermione stepped out of the fireplace. "Is Harry here? I really need to talk to him."

Remus shook his head. "He's gone out to dinner with Nia and Grim this evening. Is there anything I can do?"

Hermione shook her head. "I want Harry."

Luna got up. "Why don't you come with me?"

Hermione let Luna lead her off. Luna took her up to the room she was staying in. "What's wrong?"

"I can't tell you." Hermione couldn't bear to tell anyone what she'd just discovered.

Downstairs, Remus turned to Dudley and Jamie. "Take care of the girls. I'm going to fetch Harry."

Georgie knew something was seriously wrong for Remus to leave like that. She turned to Dudley. "What's happening? Is Hermione pregnant or something?"

Dudley hadn't thought of that. "I hope not. Dad would kill him." Suddenly he frowned. "How do you know about Hermione and Harry?"

Georgie blushed. "I can tell when someone likes somebody you know. The two of them are always making eyes at each other. I just thought that perhaps they'd gone a little further than that."

Scarlett sat wide eyed. "Harry and Hermione are going out together?"

Dudley groaned. "No, Scarlett, they're not."

Orion too was surprised. "But I thought Hermione was going out with that Venant guy."

"She is." Dudley wished that Dae had broken off his engagement formally to Hermione but as Anna had returned to Hogwarts, they'd both decided to let it lie for a little longer.

Georgie knew Dudley was lying but decided not to push it in front of Scarlett and Orion. "So I wonder what's up with her then."

"Probably can't get something right with her homework." Dudley sniggered even as he wondered whether his sister was right with her guess. "We all know what Hermione's like with her schoolwork."

Even Scarlett knew that Hermione was an overachiever. "Luna will be able to help then. She's clever."

"She certainly is." Dudley hoped that Luna had managed to find out what was wrong with Hermione.

Harry was just about to start on his dessert when felt a hand on his shoulder; looking round he was worried to find Remus standing there. "Dad, what's wrong?"

Remus ignored him for a moment to address Grim and Nia. "I'm sorry to disturb you like this, but I really need Harry to return home. Hermione's just turned up and she's pretty upset about something."

Harry immediately climbed to his feet before kissing his mother. "Sorry, Mum but I've got to go."

Auri stood up as well. "Can I come?"

"No." Nia told her. "You can finish your dinner. Harry, let me know that everything's alright, okay?"

"I will Mum." Harry shook hands with Grim. "Happy New Year, Sir."

He then turned and followed Remus out to the apparition point of the restaurant. "What's wrong with her?"

"I don't know." Remus put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "But you might be able to find out. She's with Luna."

Harry dashed up to Luna's room the moment he got back and knocked on the door before pushing it open.

As soon as Hermione saw him she burst into tears and rushed over to him. "Oh Harry."

Harry put his arms around her and looked over her head at Luna. "I'll take it from here."

Harry led Hermione up the corridor and into his own room. He then gently led her to sit on the bed. "What's wrong, Hermione?"

Hermione shook her head. "Just hold me."

Harry did as she asked, feeling large tremors wracking her body. "Please, Hermione. I want to help."

"You'll hate me." Hermione sobbed.

Harry lifted Hermione's chin to look at her face. "Considering what I've done, you've got to have done something pretty awful to make me hate you."

Hermione told him what was bothering her. "Papa told me about what had happened to Mama when she refused Voldemort. She was raped, Harry. Mama told me that I was conceived that night."

Harry rocked Hermione. "I'm really sorry, Hermione."

"When I told her I didn't know how she could have kept me, she told me that I was a gift; it didn't matter how I was conceived." Hermione shuddered as she strived to keep a hold on her emotions long enough to tell Harry. "Papa told me who raped her."

Harry knew then that Severus had told her who her father was. "He told you who fathered you, didn't he?"

Hermione nodded. "I didn't want to believe him at first."

“Why did he tell you now?” Harry had thought that Severus hadn’t intended to tell Hermione unless he really had to.

“After Diagon Alley, he said that he’d brought himself back to Voldemort’s attention again.” Hermione began.

Harry felt a shaft of shame go through him. “I’m sorry. It’s my fault.”

Hermione rushed to reassure him. “Papa told me what had happened. I know you didn’t have any choice.”

It still didn’t make Harry feel any better. “But I would have condemned him to death if he hadn’t managed to overpower Prewett and take her wand.”

Hermione scowled as she thought about her fellow Slytherin. “Papa told me what happened to her. I agree with Auri. Slytherin would be a far better place without her.” Hermione then gave a small smile. “I would have given anything to see Prewett’s face when Papa changed and flew off.”

Harry smiled. “Me too.”

Hermione knew that Harry had taken the brunt of the punishment for her father’s escape “Did your Dad hurt you really badly?”

To anyone else Harry would have lied but he didn’t want to lie to Hermione. “Yes. It was probably the most painful Cruciatus I’ve ever experienced. The Dark Lord made Dad hold it on me for what seemed like forever.”

“Harry, that’s awful.” Despite knowing that Remus had little choice, Hermione still felt angry towards him.

“It’s okay, Hermione.” Harry easily dismissed what Remus had done to him. “I’ve had done the same to Dad, if I’d had to. We both know the score.”

Hermione shivered. “I know he’s your Dad but it’s frightening to know what he’s capable of.”

"I sometimes feel the same way about myself." Harry admitted, before gently reminding Hermione of his previous question. "You were telling me why Severus told you."

Hermione wasn't able to look at Harry. "He wanted me to be able to protect myself against Black. He said that Lily had told Remus that Black had sworn to never knowingly harm any of his children." Hermione looked up at Harry, fear in her face that Harry would reject her. "I'm Sirius' daughter, Harry."

Seeing how much the truth had hurt Hermione, Harry wanted to rip Sirius apart. "I'm sorry, Hermione."

"It's alright." Hermione lied.

"No, Hermione, it's not." Harry was about to disparage Sirius when Hermione's face fell.

"You don't like me anymore, do you?" Hermione couldn't stop her voice quavering as she asked.

Harry hurried to abuse her of her misconception. "I wouldn't care if your father was Voldemort himself, Hermione. I'd still love you."

Hermione felt her heart miss a beat when she realized what Harry had said. "You love me?"

Harry kissed her on the tip of her nose. "I love you, Hermione."

Hermione couldn't believe it. "Really?"

"Really." Harry kissed her gently. "I have a confession though."

Hermione went still. "What is it?"

"I already knew it was Sirius." Harry waited for the explosion but it didn't happen. "I'd have told you but Severus wanted to be the one to do it."

"I'm glad you didn't tell me." Hermione leant into Harry's embrace. "I think it was best I learnt the truth from my parents."

Harry was relieved that Hermione understood why he hadn't revealed the truth. "Hermione, you do realize that you're actually going to have to reveal to Sirius at some point that you know who he is and what he's done before the oath he swore is effective?"

Hermione did. "When Papa told me, I guessed as much. If Sirius doesn't know I'm his daughter then he can't knowingly harm me." Hermione jumped when a knock sounded at the door.

Harry let her go and walked over to the door to find his Dad there. "Come in."

Remus walked in. Harry went to sit back by Hermione. "Severus told her about Sirius, Dad."

Hermione was shocked. "You knew as well?"

"I was there when he performed the test." Remus went and knelt in front of her. "I don't know if Severus told you but it took several calming potions to pacify him after he found out. But throughout it all, his first concern was for you and Virginie."

Hermione hadn't known that her father had performed the test. "Papa never said. Mama just told me that no matter who my birth father was, Severus was my true father and that he loved me no matter what."

"And Virginie is right Hermione. Severus does love you." Remus took Hermione's hand in his own. "Hermione, Severus intends to kill Sirius for what's he done but I think he's afraid you'll reject him for killing your birth father."

Hermione was totally astounded. "I'd kill Black myself if I had the chance. He means nothing to me; absolutely nothing. I'd stand and cheer Papa on for what that bastard's done to my mother and Harry."

"I'm glad to hear it." No-one had noticed Severus slip into the room, except for Remus.

"Papa." Hermione flung herself at Severus. "I'd never turn against you. Never. I love you."

Severus kissed Hermione on the top of her head. "And I love you, my little honey bear. I was so worried when you ran out of the house."

Hermione gave a little sob. "I wanted Harry."

"I guessed as much which is why I came here." Severus led her back over to the bed.

Harry got up to give them some privacy. Severus held out a hand to stop him. "You can stay, Harry. This is your house, and there's something we need to do."

Harry and Remus both sat down. "What is it?"

"Can you contact Dae?" Severus asked. "I think it's time he learnt about his niece."

"Oh Merlin." Hermione went bright red. "I'm so embarrassed. I never thought about Dae." Hermione buried her head in Severus' chest as she remembered how she'd begged Dae to kiss her. Now she was thankful that he'd refused.

Remus got up. "I'll let the others downstairs know that Hermione had an argument with Severus and wanted Harry."

Severus agreed. "Good idea."

Fifteen minutes later Dae was sitting a little shell-shocked at what he'd learnt. "I knew that Sirius was one of the men who'd raped Virginie but it didn't once cross my mind that Hermione might be his daughter. For some reason I'd always assumed she was Crouch's daughter."

Hermione finally managed to face him. "What should I call you now?"

"I think we'll stick with Dae." Dae responded gently. "Hermione, the Black title will be yours when Sirius dies, not Orion's. Most people believe it passes via male progeny but that's not the case with the Blacks."

"I don't want it." Hermione wanted nothing from Sirius. "I'll do whatever is necessary to sign it over to Orion."

"Once the truth comes out, I'll take you to Gringotts and we'll get it sorted." Severus promised.

"So what now?" Dae stood up.

"Now, we carry on as before." Severus informed him. "I'm going to take Hermione home with me. Harry, you're welcome to come as well."

Harry looked expectantly at Remus who smiled. "I'll sort out your trunk, and see you at school."

Harry hugged his Dad before following Severus and Hermione out.

Dae turned to Remus. "What about you?"

"I need to return the children back to Nia's and Lily's shortly. After that I'm going to drink until I can't stand anymore." Remus informed him.

"I'll take your lot home and you take Lily's. Come back to mine then. You can join Anna and me and we'll all get drunk together." Dae grinned. "After all, I've got a new niece to celebrate."

The pair then left Harry's room and headed downstairs.

2nd January 1996

Blaise watched Ginny sit down in the carriage. Swiftly he locked the door before turning on her. "Why the hell didn't you tell me you joined the Dark Lord?"

Ginny's own temper immediately flared up. "I wasn't the only one keeping secrets, Blaise."

"I've only just joined. From what I saw, you've definitely been a part of it for a lot longer." Blaise pointed out.

"I joined last year." Ginny told him. "Someone asked if I'd consider it, and I agreed."

"Who?" Blaise asked.

"I can't tell you." Ginny watched Blaise's face turn ugly. "And before you jump to the wrong conclusion, it's because I've sworn an oath to keep his identity secret. I can tell you that it was Carus but I can't tell you who he really is."

"So you know who's in the Order?" Blaise asked interestedly.

"Not all of them; just who Carus is." Ginny knew that Blaise would have been surprised to learn who had sponsored her. "Does your mother know you've joined?"

Blaise shook his head vehemently. "She'd kill me."

Ginny filed the response away; she knew she might be able to use it at a later date to her own advantage. "After what you did to me, I thought about ending our engagement."

"And what did you decide?" Blaise hoped that she wouldn't finish with him. He'd have to explain why to his mother if she did.

"That I'm going to give you another chance." Ginny wasn't willing to give up becoming Blaise's wife, even after what he'd done to her.

"How did you manage to get into trouble anyway?" Blaise had not been told what had happened.

"Alumno caught Snape in the bookstore. Alumno ordered Snape to surrender which he did. Alumno then told us to take him away. From what I've heard, Snape betrayed the Dark Lord, but I don't know

how." Ginny's mouth thinned as she thought about her professor. "I let him escape."

"But there were three of you being punished." Blaise pointed out. "You couldn't have been the main reason he got away."

"I was though. We were escorting Snape along to the apparition point when he suddenly span round and knocked me to the ground. I didn't even see it coming." Even after replaying what had happened in her mind over and over, Ginny still couldn't see how he'd been able to move so quickly. "The next thing I knew he'd got my wand. After firing a few curses off at us, he ran into Ollivanders."

"Didn't you follow him?" Blaise asked.

"Of course we did." Ginny snapped. "I pushed open the door just in time to see him change into a bat."

Blaise burst out laughing. "You've got to be kidding me."

Ginny smirked and shook her head. "Nope. His animagus is a teensy little bat." She then scowled. "Which meant that it was almost nigh on impossible to find him once he'd flown into the shadows. Praeses came along then and Magnus told him what had happened. We were ordered to burn the place down but seeing as I've heard nothing to the contrary, I can only imagine he escaped. When I got back to the Villa, I was ordered, together with Magnus and the other man whose name I never knew, to go before the Dark Lord. What happened to you?"

"I'd been taken to Villa Laurifer by Flint. We were about to leave so that I could perform my first kill when Amicus appeared and told me that my services were required. You can imagine my shock when I saw you kneeling there." Blaise had been taken aback to see Ginny.

Ginny had been equally shocked. "You could have put the Cruciatus on me. Why didn't you?"

"Because I knew that I could drop the Imperius at any time and let you live." Blaise lied.

Ginny looked doubtful. "So when you put the Imperius on me, I didn't actually overcome it?"

"No. I let it go." Blaise lied again. "You're my fiancée. I couldn't face hurting you with the Cruciatus but I needed to do something to convince the Dark Lord that I was able to kill anyone, which is why I decided to do what I did."

"I thought it might be something like that." Ginny didn't believe him.

"So we're good?" Blaise asked.

Ginny nodded. "I think it's best we put it behind us for now."

Not totally trusting Ginny's easy acceptance of what he'd done, Blaise decided nevertheless to follow Ginny's lead for the time being. "I agree."

The two of them then discussed what else they'd done over the holidays; Blaise omitting his meeting with Isobella Porter.

Later that evening

Remus opened his door with a welcoming smile. He'd already known who'd be there. "Lily, come in."

Lily stepped inside and let out a tiny gasp as Remus pulled her to him and kissed her firmly before letting her go. "That was a nice hello."

Remus smiled briefly before his face became serious. "How did Paris go?"

Lily couldn't look at him. "Don't ask."

"You slept with him didn't you?" Remus asked gently, even as he felt angry inside.

Lily nodded. "I couldn't refuse."

"Come here." Remus pulled her close. "Lily, as I've already told you, you don't have to like someone to sleep with them."

"But I don't just dislike him, Remus. I loathe him." Lily had almost scrubbed herself raw in the shower afterwards. "I've never felt so dirty before."

"Kiss me." Remus said softly, wanting to forget about Sirius.

Lily happily obliged before resting her head against his chest. "I don't know how much longer I can keep doing this."

Remus' face fell. "But I thought you wanted to be with me."

Lily realized he'd misunderstood. "I meant with Sirius, not us."

Remus let out a sigh of relief. "For one minute I thought you were going to tell me that it was over."

Lily smiled. "Don't be silly. I don't know what I'd have done without you."

"Where's Cassie?" Remus led Lily to sit down.

"Where do you think?" Lily laughed. "I believe my daughter is definitely going to be a Slytherin."

"I think you might be right." Remus pulled Lily into the crook of his arm.

Lily wrapped her arm around his waist. "Rem, can I stay here tonight?"

"You can't." Remus said quietly. "It's too close to the full moon."

"Please." Lily lifted her head, tears filling her green eyes.

Remus groaned. "You really know how to get to me, don't you?"

Lily shook her head. "I'm not trying to get to you Remus. I just want to spend time with you. If it makes it any easier, I'll sleep on top of the bed."

"Fine, you can stay." Remus bent his head to kiss her again as a knock sounded on the door. "Bloody hell."

He got up and opened the door to find Percy Prewett standing there. "Yes, Percy. What can I do for you?"

"Is Professor Black here?" Percy was a stickler for titles.

"I'll get her." Remus turned round, only to find Lily standing behind him.

Lily stood with her arms crossed. "What can I do for you Percy?"

"I was doing the rounds just now and discovered that your daughter was illegally staying in Slytherin." Percy informed her.

Lily hated the officious git. "As she has permission from Slytherin's Head of House, I don't see a problem with it."

"Rule 43(b) of Hogwarts Regulations states that no member of any other house may stay overnight in another House." Percy imperiously announced.

"My daughter isn't a member of a house though." Lily informed him. "So she's not breaking that rule."

"But she's breaking Rule 43(f) then. Anyone not affiliated with a House may not stay overnight in it." Percy announced triumphantly.

Lily scowled. "Follow me." She then stormed out of Remus' rooms and towards the Headmaster's office.

Dumbledore looked up in surprise to see Lily, Remus and Percy all enter his office. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

“Cassie’s staying overnight in Slytherin and Percy has pointed out that it’s against the school regulations.” Lily informed him.

“I don’t see a problem with her staying there for one night.” Dumbledore smiled at Percy.

Percy shook his head. “The Minister said that if I took this appointment I needed to adhere to the rules; that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

Dumbledore sighed and got up, throwing floo powder into the fireplace. “Severus Snape.”

Severus’ head appeared a few moments later. “What can I do for you, Headmaster?”

“Can you please bring Cassandra Black through?” Dumbledore asked.

Lily waited until Severus stepped through the floo holding a pajama clad Cassie in front of him. Cassie looked scared. “What’s going on, Mum?”

“Professor Prewett isn’t happy about you staying overnight in Slytherin, Cassie.” Lily scowled at him. “It appears to be against the rules.”

Severus also scowled. “I’d agreed to Miss Black staying there.”

“It doesn’t matter, Professor Snape.” Percy pointed out. “It’s still against the rules.”

“Then I’d like my daughter to be sorted now.” Lily smiled sweetly at Percy. “Or is there a rule against that?”

Percy immediately pulled his pocket version of the rules out and thumbed through it, looking disappointed when he couldn’t find one to prevent it. “No, there doesn’t appear to be one.”

Lily looked at Dumbledore. “If you wouldn’t mind, I’d like to use the Sorting Hat.”

Cassie felt excited at her mother's request. "Does this mean I can start taking lessons properly now?"

"No." Lily told her. "Just that you'd have the right to stay overnight in a house."

Normally Albus would have refused but even though Percy was his spy amongst the staff, he was just as irritated with Percy's behavior as everyone else was. Getting up he picked up the hat. "Let's see then."

He put the hat on Cassie's head.

Cassie jumped slightly as a voice sounded in her head. "Hello Miss Black. A little early aren't we?"

Cassie nodded violently, almost knocking the hat from its perch. "Yes."

"You can just think your answers." The hat informed her. "I'll hear them. I see you'd like to be in Slytherin. Most people want to avoid that house."

As the hat had requested, Cassie thought her answer. "All of my friends are in that house. I like Professor Snape and I'm willing to do whatever it takes to get in."

The hat could see that Cassie was determined. "Anything you say?"

"Anything." Cassie affirmed her answer.

"Are you sure you wouldn't prefer to go into Gryffindor like your parents?" The hat knew the question would frustrate Cassie.

"No, I wouldn't." Cassie thought quickly. "Can I do something for you to help persuade you?"

The hat laughed. "Okay you win, for that it's going to be SLYTHERIN."

Cassie thought the words thank you and then pulled the hat off and passed it back to the headmaster. "Thank you Headmaster."

Dumbledore smirked at Percy. "Perhaps we might all be allowed to get some sleep now."

Percy knew he was beaten. "Of course Headmaster, but you must understand rules are rules."

"Goodnight Percy." Dumbledore dismissed him. "Severus, you can take Cassandra back via the floo. I expect your daughter is awaiting her return."

"Goodnight, Headmaster." Severus led Cassie into the floo and they both disappeared.

Remus and Lily left the office together with Percy stalking away in front. Lily grinned. "At least I don't need to wonder what house Cassie's going to be in now."

Remus smiled. "I wonder what she offered the hat to put her in that house. It did appear to take a little while."

"I don't know but I know she really likes Severus." Lily laughed. "Which is more than most children can say."

Remus stopped outside Lily's door. "I think it best if I say goodnight now."

"Please don't go." Lily pleaded.

Remus nodded to the door. "Let's go in for a minute." Once inside Remus shut the door and turned to Lily. "You can stay with me another night, but not tonight."

Lily didn't want Remus to go. "You're concerned about Percy turning up again, aren't you?"

"Yes." Remus admitted. "You've seen what's he like. He wouldn't think twice about reporting us and I really don't want to have to oblivate a member of staff, even if he is an idiot."

"But I really don't want to be alone." Lily hated that she was being so clingy but after spending time with Sirius she really needed Remus' reassurance.

Remus ran a hand over Lily's face. "Lily, not tonight. If Percy finds out and I failed to stop him, we could both lose our jobs. While I could deal with losing my job, you couldn't. At the moment Hogwarts is a sanctuary for you." Remus sighed. "To say nothing of what Sirius would do to both of us if he found out."

"But we haven't done anything yet." Lily pointed out.

"Yet, Lily, yet." Remus ran his thumb over Lily's bottom, feeling her quiver as he did so. "We both know that eventually something is going to happen."

Lily wrapped her arms around Remus' neck and pulled his head down so that she could kiss him, before reluctantly letting him go. "I'd best say goodnight then."

Remus opened the door. "Goodnight, Lily."

Lily watched as the door closed behind Remus. She'd badly wanted him to hold her but knew that he was right. If Sirius ever found out, they'd both end up paying the price. Sighing she headed into her bedroom.

20th January 1996

Albus was just having a cup of tea when his fireplace flared to life. Expecting Alice he got up to greet her, only to take a step backwards in shock. "Alice, are you alright?"

"She will be if you do exactly as I tell you." Voldemort stepped out of the fireplace, his arm around Alice's waist and his wand pointing at her throat.

“What do you want?” Albus couldn’t risk a spell.

“I want the book that registers the students’ births.” Voldemort ordered.

“I can’t do that, Tom.” Albus told him. “Not even for Alice.”

Voldemort whispered a spell and Alice began to scream. “I know you don’t care about the school, Dumbledore. But you do care about your goddaughter and she’s going to die if you don’t do something.”

Unable to see his goddaughter suffer, Albus hurried over to the wall and slid a tapestry aside. The book lay in a niche behind it. He handed it over to Voldemort who released the spell on Alice, who by now could do little more than hang limply in his arms. “Good, now we’re going to take a little trip to the second floor.”

Albus knew immediately they were off to the Chamber. “You said you’d release her.”

“I’ll release her when we reach our destination.” Voldemort promised. “I give you my word as a wizard.”

Albus led the way down the staircase and out into the main school. He just hoped no-one got in the way.

Just as Voldemort was making his presence known, Harry, Jamie and Draco were making their way up from the quidditch pitch. Even though they were on opposing sides, the three of them enjoyed practicing together. Usually Dudley would be there but he’d promised to ‘study’ with Luna. Draco handed Harry Dudley’s broom. “That is one amazing broom.”

Jamie grinned. “I know Harry promised me a new broom but I didn’t expect a customized Firebolt II for Christmas.”

“I bet Dudley didn’t either.” Draco had to admit to feeling a little jealous of the broom.

“Well, I could hardly buy one for one brother and not the other, now could I?” Harry loved his new broom. When he'd gotten it, Auri had begged him for the one Remus had bought him when he'd first made the quidditch team, and so he'd given his to her and Dudley had done the same for Georgie. Jamie in turn had passed his now hated Firebolt on to Orion.

“Hello boys.” Sirius greeted the three of them.

Engrossed in their conversation, none of the boys had seen Sirius approaching. Harry hid his scowl. “Sirius, what are you doing here?”

“It was my monthly assessment of the trainee from the hospital. I saw you three coming in and thought I'd walk down and see you.” Sirius told him. “I'm on my way to see Remus. Perhaps you'd care to join me.”

Draco shook his head. “I'd like to Uncle Sirius but I'm behind with my schoolwork.”

Sirius turned to Jamie and Harry. “In that case, how about you two boys keep me company?”

Harry recognized the order couched inside the polite invitation. “I'm not doing anything else right now.”

Curious as to why Sirius wanted Harry along, Jamie followed Harry's lead. “Neither am I.”

After passing all three brooms to Draco, the two boys followed Sirius up to the second floor to Remus' office.

Draco waited until they'd disappeared out of sight before heading to see his Aunt.

Lily opened the door to her rooms to find Draco standing there. “Hi, Draco; is everything alright?”

Draco frowned. “I don't know. Sirius has just come into school and asked Jamie and Harry to go with him to see Professor Lupin.”

Lily looked behind her. "I've got Cassie with me. Would you stay with her while I go and pop down to Remus' office?"

Draco stepped inside. "Hi Cassie."

"Hi Dray." Cassie knew her cousin hated being called by his shortened name. "What's going on?"

Draco scowled as he plonked himself down next to her. "Your Mum needs to see your Uncle Remus about something, so I'm going to be staying with you."

Satisfied that Cassie would be taken care of, Lily closed the door and hurried off towards Remus' office.

Remus opened his office door to find Sirius and the two boys standing there. "What brings you here?"

Sirius entered the room and shut the door before warding it securely and turning to Jamie and Harry. "I need you to get your masks and meet me back at the girls' bathroom on this floor."

Jamie pretended to be confused. "What do you mean Dad?"

Sirius smiled and placed a hand on Jamie's shoulder. "I know you're Carus, Jamie."

Jamie took a step backwards. "I don't know what you're talking about."

Sirius wished he'd told Jamie who he was before now. "Jamie, I'm Amicus." At Jamie's shocked face, he continued. "I'm sorry but I don't have time to talk about this now. Please fetch the masks but don't put them on. We'll see you in the girls' bathroom."

Jamie couldn't believe Sirius had decided to tell him at that moment. "They're in Uncle Remus' rooms, Dad."

“Jamie, go fetch them.” Remus ordered. “Take Harry with you. He can get you past my wards.” Sirius then dropped the wards so that the two boys could leave before re-invoking them.

“Not exactly the right time to tell him, was it Sirius?” Remus sounded amused.

“I was going to tell him over the holidays but because I took Lily away I didn’t get round to it.” Sirius said hurriedly. “We need to hurry. Our Master should be here by now.”

“I wasn’t expecting to do this until next month.” As he spoke, Remus transfigured his clothes into a simple black outfit.

“Alice told our Master that she was due to visit Dumbledore today so with my being here as well, the opportunity was too good to miss. Our Master wants it over and done with so he can concentrate on other things.” Sirius changed his own outfit.

Remus was glad that the time to face one of his tormentors had finally come. “Let’s go then.”

The two of them made their way to the bathroom where Harry and Jamie soon joined them. Both of them knew better than to ask what was going on. Sirius turned to Harry. “Open the entrance.”

Harry stood in front of the sink and hissed softly. Remus, who hadn’t been there before, watched with interest as the sink moved away.

“Stairs, I think.” Sirius informed Harry who hadn’t known about them.

Soon the four of them found themselves standing in the Chamber. Remus gagged at the smell of the basilisk that was rotting on the floor. He thought that it would have completely disintegrated by now. Sirius quickly banished the snake and cast a clean air spell; all four of them feeling better after he’d done so, particularly Remus whose keen sense of smell had been most offended by the stench.

Not finding Remus in his office, Lily made her way back along the second floor corridor, only to grind to a halt at the sight of Voldemort dragging Alice along with him, and Dumbledore marching in front.

“Lady Black, how lovely to see you again.” Voldemort smiled. “We’re going on a little trip. Perhaps you’d care to join us.”

Dumbledore looked pleadingly at her. “Please, Lily. Do as he asks.”

Lily felt her blood run cold as she was shepherded into the girls’ bathroom, and Voldemort hissed at the sink which opened and then nodded towards the stairs. “Get down there.”

Lily followed Dumbledore, Voldemort helping Alice make her way down. Once they’d gone past the final door, Voldemort hissed once more and the door closed.

Harry was horrified to see Lily with Voldemort and the others. Jamie called out “Mum” and went to dash to her, only for Remus’ restraining hand to stop him.

Albus was surprised to find two other Death Eaters together with Jamie and Harry. “I said I’d talk to you, now let Alice and the others go. You don’t want them.”

Voldemort nodded towards Remus. “Let the boys go, Praeses, and set up the wards.”

Harry and Jamie hurried over to Lily as Remus put anti-apparition, animagus and portkey wards into place. Voldemort then gently released Alice, and handed a potion over to her. “Are you alright?”

Alice swallowed the potion before responding. “I am my Lord.”

Albus felt sick. “Alice?”

Alice pulled her silver mask from under her cloak. “Surprised?”

“But I trusted you.” Albus was reeling.

“More fool you then.” Alice moved to stand by Remus and Sirius.

Albus realized why he’d felt so tired and worn out all the time. “You’ve destroyed my horcrux, haven’t you?”

Voldemort answered him. “I did. You should have taken more care when you decided who to entrust something so precious with.”

Knowing he had nothing to lose, Albus snorted. “As you did with the diary?”

Voldemort shrugged. “I didn’t repeat the same mistake twice though. It must be hard to learn that the two people you once trusted most in the world both betrayed you. At least I know I can trust the person who carries my horcrux unreservedly.”

At that moment Albus knew he wouldn’t be leaving the Chamber alive. “But why, Alice? What did I ever do to turn you away from me?”

“You sold me out. I never wanted to marry Frank Longbottom but you used the guardianship my mother gave you to force me into that marriage.” Alice spat out at him. “I was only sixteen and you married me off to a man I didn’t love.”

“I wanted to see you in a good pureblood marriage. I didn’t want to see the girl I considered my daughter tying herself down to a half-blood. Frank was a good man.” Albus argued, conveniently forgetting that he’d killed Frank. “Your marriage couldn’t have been that bad. You bore him two children.”

“No, Albus, I didn’t.” Alice couldn’t wait to see Albus’ face when she told him. “Seville’s not his daughter.”

“Then whose is she?” Albus was shocked.

“She’s my daughter.” Voldemort put his arm around Alice’s shoulder. “Without Seville’s blood, my resurrection wouldn’t have turned out in quite the same way as it did.”

“You used her blood to resurrect you?” Dumbledore was aghast.

“With the help of a few other things.” Voldemort didn’t bother going into detail. “One day Seville will take her place at my side along with Carus.”

“Carus?” Albus knew the names of the two new members of the Order but he’d believed that Carus was simply a member of Voldemort’s guard.

“My new apprentice.” Voldemort informed him.

Jamie was glad that Remus had already told him about Voldemort’s plans otherwise he might have betrayed himself.

Playing for time and trying to work out how to escape, Albus nodded towards Harry and Jamie. “Why are they here?”

“I’d like them to see the end of the man who stole their lives.” Voldemort told him. “Because of you Lady Black thought her son was dead as did Jamie his brother. That wasn’t very nice of you was it?”

“It was for the best. Anyway it doesn’t matter what you do to me. Jamie will defeat you in the end. The prophecy says so.” Dumbledore put great store in the prophecies.

“Ah, yes, the prophecy.” Voldemort laughed. “Tricky things aren’t they?” He then quoted the prophecy in full.

“To parents who’ve defied him thrice

One of two born as the seventh month doth end

Shall defeat the Dark Lord

Else darkness shall descend

He must make a terrible choice

Or else his world he’ll sacrifice

Of the twins who bear the mark

He much choose, light or dark.”

Albus smirked. “But he’s already made his choice. Jamie Potter comes from a light family. His adoptive father is well-known for standing out against anything dark as is Lily. Jamie will never betray his world.”

“You’d think that wouldn’t you?” Voldemort held out his free hand. “Carus, come here.”

Jamie walked over to Voldemort who put an arm around Jamie’s shoulder. “My Lord?”

Albus couldn’t believe it. “But you’re the Boy Who Lived.”

“I know that.” Jamie enjoyed the seeing the horrified look on Dumbledore’s face.

Albus’ anger took over from shock. “You were supposed to defeat the Dark Lord, not join him.”

Voldemort laughed. “You haven’t really got a good track record have you? First Grindelwald and Alice betray you and now Jamie.”

At the mention of Grindelwald’s name, Albus thought about what had been taken from him. “You took the Hallows didn’t you?”

“Of course. Alice got me into your office the same way as she did today.” Voldemort let go of Alice and Jamie to walk up to Dumbledore. “If only you’d known Alice was my servant, you’d have realized that standard Veritaserum wouldn’t work on her.”

Albus had never suspected Alice after she’d taken the Veritaserum. “You’ll never get the final Hallow, Tom, and even if you do, you need to have killed Grindelwald to become its master. I killed Grindelwald.”

Voldemort hadn’t known about Dumbledore killing Grindelwald as Sirius hadn’t been able to tell him because of the oath he’d sworn to

the Alliance. "That's interesting to learn but I don't need to. If you'd had the chance to finish translating the papers, you'd have found that there's another way to take control of the Elder Wand; something Lady Black is going to help me with."

Albus span round to face Lily. "You can't do that."

"I can do whatever I want." Lily told him quietly.

"I can't believe you're a Death Eater as well." Albus felt as if his world had been turned upside down.

"I'm not." Lily took pleasure in seeing a confused look cross Albus' face.

"But I am." Remus knew it was the right moment to reveal himself and took off his mask. "Hello Dumbledore."

Albus wasn't surprised to see Remus, and felt a moment of hope that he might actually get out of this alive. He decided to play along. "Remus, how could you?"

Voldemort walked over to stand by Remus. "I shouldn't bother Dumbledore. Remus here is actually my faithful servant. I know he was once your spy."

Remus pulled out his earring before throwing it across the Chamber. "This is for you, Dumbledore."

Albus caught the earring. "But how?"

"Does it matter?" Remus sneered. "All that matters is that I'm free of you and what you put me through."

Albus didn't want to believe that everyone had turned against him. "It was all for the greater good."

Remus advanced upon Dumbledore. "Greater good? Is that what you told the thousands of innocents you slaughtered in the name of war working with Hitler and Grindelwald?" Remus had asked Dae to

release him from his vow to the Alliance so that he could use the knowledge if necessary. "You deserve to die for that alone."

"But I never did anything to you." Dumbledore pointed out. "I've never once hurt you."

Remus disagreed. "Maybe not by your own hand but because of you I went through hell. When my Master discovered I was a werewolf I was left at the mercy of the Order. They punished me until I almost died. When I came to you begging for help to get out, what did you do? You told me just to get on with it. I was only seventeen, Dumbledore, seventeen."

Remus took a deep breath and continued. "While I had underhand motives for joining at first, I soon began to see that my Master had never lied to me. Unlike you he never used sugar coated words to hide what he was and what he wanted. I began to like to what I heard and reveled in my position."

Dumbledore looked appalled. "You're proud of what you've become, aren't you?"

Remus lied and nodded. "I am. I suppose I should thank you. Without your help, I wouldn't be the man I am today."

Voldemort moved forward to stand back next to Remus. "You see Dumbledore, the man you once sent to spy for you has turned on you. I was at least honest with him. Perhaps if you'd done the same you wouldn't be standing where you are now."

Dumbledore looked to the other man who had been standing at Voldemort's right. "You're Amicus, aren't you?"

Sirius nodded but didn't attempt to remove his mask. "I am."

"Who are you?" Despite the precarious situation he was in, Dumbledore still wanted answers.

"Someone you've wronged." Sirius stepped forward. "If my Master didn't want the pleasure of taking your life, then I would happily do so myself."

Dumbledore had no idea who was behind the mask. "You're not going to reveal your identity?"

"Why not, everyone else has." Sirius pulled off his mask.

Albus felt his heart sink. He knew he'd get no help from that quarter. "So what now?"

Voldemort answered him. "You might be wondering why I went to such elaborate lengths to get you down here."

"I am." Albus answered. "You'd already destroyed my horcrux. You could have simply killed me in my office."

"I didn't want to make a mess of the office that Remus here will one day occupy." Voldemort couldn't resist taunting Dumbledore.

"A werewolf will never grace that seat." Albus snapped back.

"I said the same about the Death Eaters but Remus is now my second in command." Voldemort informed him. "You should learn to never say never."

"The board of governors will never allow it." Albus pointed out.

"They've let him teach here and Lucius is my servant, so I doubt I'll ever have a problem with the governors." Voldemort smirked. "As I was saying earlier, I've brought you down here because I wanted you to die in the Chamber where I discovered my heritage. I think it only fitting." Voldemort pulled out his wand.

Knowing that his time had ran out, Albus reach out and grabbed Lily, putting his wand to her throat. "I suggest you let me out of here now or I won't hesitate to kill her."

Both Remus and Sirius went to move forward only for Voldemort to hold up his hand. "Do you really think that the death of the Mudblood is going to bother me?"

Albus smiled cunningly. "You've already admitted you need her help."

"I can always find another charms expert, Dumbledore." Voldemort pointed out. "As I said, I'm not bothered what you do to her, but Sirius and her sons might have a problem with it."

Sirius went to move forward again but Dumbledore shook his head; he knew Sirius' reputation too well. "Take one step closer and she's going to pay the price."

Voldemort decided to step back and see what happened. "I was going to offer you a one on one duel instead of killing you outright but you've now taken that decision out of my hands. I'm going to enjoy watching you die at the hands of one of her family." Alice and Remus both stood down at Voldemort's comment.

Sirius, Harry and Jamie all had drawn their wands. "Let her go."

Albus shook his head. "I can't do that, Harry. She's my ticket out of here."

Sirius started to circle slowly around. Normally he'd have simply taken a chance and fired off a spell but if he missed he knew that Lily would pay the price.

Jamie blocked Dumbledore's path. "Don't even think about it."

"Are you really going to risk your precious Mudblood mother's life?" Albus taunted him as he moved towards Jamie, dragging Lily with him.

"Just kill him." Lily struggled against Dumbledore's grip. "Don't worry about me."

"He's going to let you go." Harry snarled. "Dumbledore if you don't release her, I promise you will live to regret it."

"I'm not going to have anything to regret if I don't let her go, now am I? You're not going to kill me while I hold her hostage." Dumbledore pointed out.

Realizing he wasn't going to get anywhere by threatening Dumbledore, Harry decided to negotiate. "As you've now lost the opportunity to duel with Lord Voldemort, how about you take me on instead?"

Remus shook his head. "No, Harry."

Voldemort held up his hand. "Leave him be, Remus."

Albus hesitated as he recognized Remus' reluctance to let his son fight him. "What are your terms?"

Harry hadn't expected Albus to agree. He turned to Voldemort for clarification. "As Lord Voldemort has turned down the opportunity to duel with you by giving it to me, I think he should name the terms."

Voldemort did so. "If you win, I will let you leave alive but you will go from this place and leave England forever, never to return. Also you will swear an oath never to reveal what has happened here today. Standard dueling terms will apply. No second wands; no wandless magic; no silent magic. While you are dueling with Harry, everyone will stand down, but if there is any treachery then you become a free target."

"How do I know you will keep your word?" Dumbledore didn't expect Voldemort to do so.

Voldemort swore an oath as to the terms he'd named. "You can now let Lady Black go."

Dumbledore let Lily go. "You're taking a big chance here, Tom. It's not as if a fifth year student is going to beat me."

Harry smiled nastily. "I believe my Lord may have made a slight omission when he introduced everyone else to you. So let me do it myself. I am Alumno."

Dumbledore was almost as shocked at finding that out as he had been about Alice. "You're Amicus' apprentice?"

Sirius smirked as he watched Harry take a small bow in recognition. "He is. And I have to say that one day he'll be almost as good as I am."

Albus realized that he'd been tricked into fighting Harry but he was still confident that he'd beat him. "No matter, I'm still going to win."

Harry simply walked into the large space once occupied by the basilisk. "Do you have any last wishes, Dumbledore?"

Albus shook his head. "I'd say the same about you."

Harry took a deep breath and took up the correct dueling stance. "I'm ready."

Sirius pulled Lily towards him. "He'll win."

Lily couldn't watch and turned into Sirius' chest. Remus felt his stomach go over as he watched Lily to turn to Sirius for comfort.

Dumbledore pulled out his wand and bowed before firing off a reducto curse which missed Harry by mere inches.

Harry realized that Dumbledore wasn't going to start easy and work his way up as Sirius usually did. Harry returned fire. "Abrumpo Collum."

Dumbledore threw up a reflective shield sending the decapitation spell back tumbling back towards Harry. Harry rolled under the spell and sent yet another spell towards Dumbledore. "Minuo Maximus."

Dumbledore let the bloodletting curse wash over him; his family ring providing protection against it. "Aduro Sectum."

Harry yelled as a burning cut sliced into his face. Hearing Harry's cry, Lily span round and attempted to pull free of Sirius, who refused to let her go.

Harry responded quickly. "Contego Aqua."

Dumbledore watched as a large wall of water headed his way. He used an umbrella shield to disperse it before sending a bone-breaking curse back at Harry.

Harry's shield shattered under the force of the spell allowing it to penetrate and break Harry's shoulder bone. Harry's wand fell to the floor.

Jamie pulled out his wand, only for Sirius to place a restraining hand on his shoulder. "Harry must do this alone." Jamie kept out his wand but didn't attempt to go to Harry's aid.

Dumbledore grinned and sent another spell at Harry. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry waited until the spell was almost upon him before dropping to the ground and grabbing his wand, screaming out his next spell. "Reducto."

Caught totally unawares, Albus screamed out as a large chunk of his right shoulder was blown away by Harry's spell.

Harry rolled back to his feet, trying to work through the pain as Sirius had taught him to. "Sectum Dexter."

Dumbledore let out another scream of pain and fear as Harry's spell severed his right hand, and the hand, still holding his wand, dropped to the ground.

Lily gasped as Harry lifted his head. His eyes were now totally black. Harry's face took on a hard look and he smiled viciously as he lazily incanted his next spell. "Aduro Barba."

Albus used his remaining hand to put out the flames that ignited his long beard, only to hear yet another spell heading his way. "Lente Mille Vengradis Sectum."

Dumbledore couldn't escape the pain as small cuts slowly began to appear all over his body, and he collapsed to his knees. "Have mercy."

Harry impassively watched Dumbledore suffer for several long minutes before finally halting the spell. "Subsisto."

Standing opposite the kneeling headmaster, Harry knew the time had come to end it. He turned and knelt before Voldemort. "My Lord, he is yours to take."

Voldemort respected Harry's offer but refused it. "The victory is to be yours Harry."

Before Harry could get up, Dumbledore withdrew a second wand and aimed it at Voldemort and Harry. "Avada Kedavra."

Lily screamed. "Harry look out."

If anyone could have asked Harry what had happened in those moments as he spun round to face Dumbledore, he would have told them that it had seemed as if time had slowed down to a crawl. Harry had watched as Sirius had pushed Lily to the floor, covering her with his own body. Out of the corner of his eye, all he saw was a black blur, as Remus, who had obviously seen Dumbledore's hand moving to draw the wand before anyone else had and moving faster than anyone would have thought possible, slammed into both Harry and his Master pushing them both towards the floor. Jamie, who already had his wand drawn, screamed out his own spell. "Avada Kedavra." As his world went black, Harry's last sight was of dark blue cloth and green light.

Next Chapter: Aftermath of the Chamber.

Chapter 61: Repercussions

Harry woke up to find Sirius sitting beside him. "Sirius, where's Dad?"

"Still being interviewed by Aurors." Sirius smiled. "They won't be interviewing you. We told them that you were knocked out almost immediately upon entering the Chamber."

"Jamie?" Harry struggled to sit up.

"He's fine." Sirius helped him slide up the bed. "Lily is with him in her rooms."

Harry looked round. "Can anyone hear us?"

Sirius shook his head. "When you started to wake up I invoked a privacy spell. But I doubt anyone will be along as it's almost midnight."

Harry was concerned. "And they're still interviewing Dad?"

"Don't worry, Remus will be okay. Jamie vouched for everyone." Sirius smirked. "No-one's going to disbelieve the Boy Who Lived."

Harry knew Sirius had a point. "So what did you tell them?"

"That you slipped on the stairway entering the Chamber and took a tumble to the bottom. It was the easiest way without trying to heal all of your injuries on the spot, and we wanted to at least make your injuries seem believable." Sirius knew that the story would irk Harry.

It did. "Great. I duel Dumbledore and defeat him and what do I get, a tumble down the stairs."

"Harry, you're supposed to be a quiet, but studious Ravenclaw. Let's keep it that way." Sirius passed him a painkilling potion. "I can see your head is hurting you still; that's some concussion you've got."

Harry took the potion and felt relieved when it began to work its magic. "And how did you explain all of us being in the Chamber at the same time?"

"That was easy." Sirius leant back against the chair he sitting in. "Poppy was obviously aware I was in the school. I simply said I came across you two boys when I was on my way to see Remus. Lily was already in Remus' office discussing detentions for next week when we got there. As you all walked me out, we came across Dumbledore and Voldemort, who was holding Alice as a hostage, and into the Chamber we all went."

Harry hated the smug look on Sirius' faces. "So what supposedly happened after my heroic fall?"

Sirius' look turned dark. "The Dark Lord and Dumbledore dueled after Dumbledore negotiated for all of our lives. Unfortunately Alice got in the way of a killing curse being sent at Jamie; throwing herself in front of it to save his life."

Harry's face fell. "Alice Longbottom is dead?"

"She saved your life, Harry." Sirius had been upset to see his friend and colleague die.

"But why?" Harry couldn't understand why she'd done that.

"Because as a lower member of the Order she's sworn to protect anyone who outranks her." Sirius informed him.

"But I've never sworn to protect Dad's life and he outranks me." Harry pointed out.

"No, Harry, he doesn't." Sirius hadn't intended to tell Harry yet but he'd have found out soon enough. "Even as my apprentice you are still on the same level as Remus and myself. Once your training is complete, you'll wear the same mask as we do."

Harry wiped a hand over his face. "What about Neville and his sister?"

“They’ll be coming to live with me.” Sirius knew his words would surprise Harry. “Alice’s Will appointed their guardianship to me.”

It wasn't quite what Harry had been about asking about. “They’ve still both got their grandmother.”

“She’ll have no say in the matter.” Sirius had already sent a message to Gringotts so that Alice’s Will could be read and finalized as soon as possible. “At Easter, Seville and her brother will be coming back to Grimmauld Place with me.”

Harry knew that Neville wouldn’t be happy to find that out. “And what of Dumbledore?”

“Jamie fulfilled the second prophecy that Dumbledore held such great store in.” Sirius was proud of what Jamie had done. “He used the killing curse on him.”

“I heard him call out the spell just before I blacked out. Why did I black out?” Harry asked.

“Remus hit you and our Master with such force that you were both knocked unconscious.” Sirius had healed his Master’s head and re-energized him but Harry had remained unconscious. “I was able to revive our Master but I think your head took the blunt of the blow.”

“I’ve never seen Dad move so fast before.” Harry could just remember a black blur.

“I have.” Sirius informed him. “His speed is one of the reasons why our Master chose him as a member of his guard. Remus has saved him on several occasions.”

“But Dad didn’t need to save the Dark Lord, did he?” Harry decided to see if he could learn anything more about the horcrux. “He’s quite safe while you hold his horcrux.”

Sirius laughed. “Well deduced; this goes to show why you’re in Ravenclaw. I do carry his horcrux, and I’d die before I give it up.”

"I didn't expect anything different." Harry answered honestly.

Sirius turned his attention to the duel. "You made a few mistakes when dueling Dumbledore. You do know where the entrance to the Shrieking Shack is, don't you?"

Harry did as Remus had told him. "Yes."

"On the afternoon of my scheduled visit to see Poppy next month, you'll go to the Shack and await me there. I'm going to be putting you through your paces. Make sure you practice." Sirius' face was quite stern.

Harry had hoped that with the Hogsmeade visits still cancelled, he'd escaped any more sessions with Sirius. "Yes, Sir."

The ward doors swung open, and Sirius dropped the privacy spell. The curtains were pulled back to reveal Remus. "Harry, you're awake."

"Are you alright?" Harry looked carefully at Remus' face.

"I'm fine." Remus turned to Sirius. "I'll sit with him if you want to get back home."

"Thanks." Sirius got up. "I'll see you soon."

Harry's polite face disintegrated into a scowl once he'd heard the fireplace in Madam Pomfrey's office flare up. "I really do hate him."

Remus invoked the same spell as Sirius had. "Are you really feeling okay?"

"My head's still a little sore even with the potion." Harry admitted.

"Head aside, I'm just glad you're alright. When I saw Dumbledore's hand moving, I just knew what he was going to do." Remus had never been more thankful of his abilities before than he'd been that afternoon. "I was so scared when I heard him recite the killing curse

as I was moving; I was afraid I wouldn't reach you in time. I'm just glad I did."

"But if you pushed me out of the way, how did Alice die?" Harry realized that Sirius hadn't exactly told him how it had happened.

"Just before Jamie's curse hit him, Dumbledore sent a second curse almost immediately after his first one. I started to roll over to take the curse, but by now Alice had caught up with me and threw herself in front of it instead." Remus explained.

"Does Neville know yet?" Harry knew that Remus would tell him what he'd expected Sirius to inform him about.

"Yes. He and Seville have returned home." Remus took Harry's hand in his own. "We aren't going to tell Neville about his mother. It wouldn't be fair."

Harry disagreed. "The truth about Seville is going to come out, especially as Sirius is getting her and Neville's guardianship under Alice's Will. Dad, Sirius said that he's going to take them back to live with him at Easter."

Remus was stunned. "Sirius is their guardian?"

Harry nodded. "He's already sent a message to Gringotts to set the reading of the Will in motion."

"Bloody hell." Remus wasn't happy. "If that's true, then I suspect the Dark Lord intends to introduce himself to his daughter a little earlier than I believe he'd planned to."

"Do you think we should tell Neville who his sister is?" Harry knew it would be better coming from them than from anyone else.

"We're going to have to aren't we, as well as telling Seville about the Dark Lord." Remus dropped his head into his hands. "This mess just keeps getting worse and worse."

Harry decided to let the matter of Seville lie for a moment. "Dad, I suppose you worked out that Sirius is holding a horcrux for the Dark Lord."

"I did, and that complicates matters." Remus hadn't exactly been surprised by the news.

"Not really." Harry already had an idea. "We need to find someone to kill Sirius and then destroy his body. The horcrux should survive a simple incineration. We should be able to work out what it is then."

Remus frowned at Harry's cold assessment of how to obtain the horcrux. "You're getting to be a little callous, Harry."

"Dad, this is war." Harry knew he wasn't the boy he'd been before Sirius had gotten his claws into him. "I'm willing to do whatever it takes to end it."

"I know, Harry." Remus hated the effect that it was having on his son. "Your destruction of Dumbledore proved that."

Harry sighed. "I almost lost control again."

"I think you did lose control. Your eyes were pitch black. You certainly scared Lily." Remus had seen Lily's horrified look and Sirius' pleased one.

"I just wanted to hurt him so badly for what he'd done to us." Harry admitted. "If he hadn't begged for mercy, I would have just gone on."

"I was surprised when you stopped." Remus had expected Harry to continue to torment Dumbledore to death. "I certainly didn't expect you to offer the Dark Lord the final blow."

"I could have so easily gone on, Dad." Harry hadn't been lying to Hermione when he'd told her he scared himself sometimes. "I was beginning to enjoy seeing Dumbledore lying at my feet. I was frightened of what I found myself wanting to do, which is why I wanted the Dark Lord to finish him, not me. I never foresaw Jamie ending it."

Remus was alarmed by Harry's confession. "Jamie reacted out of anger and fear for you, nothing more Harry."

"I can't keep doing this, Dad." Harry knew he was going to fall if he did. "There's a part of me that's always going to be tempted to go that little bit further if I do."

"Not what I needed to hear." Remus wished that they could bring forward their plan but they were having to work with the Dark Lord's timetable, not their own.

"Sorry, I'll do my best to control it." Harry yawned. "Is there going to be announcement about Dumbledore?"

"Tomorrow at breakfast." Remus informed him. "You won't be expected to be there of course."

"Who's going to take over from Dumbledore?" Harry suspected McGonagall.

"Minerva will." Remus had already spoken to the Headmistress. "You're looking at the new Deputy Headmaster."

Harry was pleased for his Dad. "That's great."

"I thought she'd offer it to Severus but she told me that Severus has never had any inclination to take up that position, and to be honest, with the Dark Lord's interest in him reawakened, it's probably a good job." Remus knew that the Dark Lord had more planned for Severus than just a simple death.

Harry read between the lines. "What does he want Severus for?"

"Potions of course." Remus told him. "No-one's better than Severus, except possibly Grimstock."

"Aren't his family in danger now?" Harry's first concern was for them, as he knew Severus would be thinking the same way.

“Yes, which is why Virginie has already returned to Snape Manor along with Dominic. Unfortunately we can’t remove Livvy or Bas.”

“Hermione at least should have some measure of protection.” Harry was fairly relieved in some respects that Hermione was Sirius’ daughter.

“From Sirius yes, but not from the Dark Lord.” Remus stretched, feeling his muscles tighten before relaxing. “That was one grueling session.”

“Did they hurt you?” Harry remembered Sirius mentioning how the Aurors had treated him.

“Not at all. I was only so long because I was in with Minerva first.” Remus smiled. “Kingsley interviewed me.”

Harry took a little comfort from the fact that Remus had been seen by someone he apparently trusted. “Dad, when’s the Dark Lord going to take over Hogwarts?”

“I don’t know yet.” Remus knew it was coming but he had no idea when.

“But he will won’t he?” Harry hated the idea of the safe haven being lost to everyone.

“Yes, Harry, he will.” Remus sounded resigned to the fact. “But I think he intends to take the Ministry first.”

Harry thought about it for a moment. “If I was him, I’d take them both at the same time.”

“Which is what I’d do, but I’m not sure he intends to go that way.” Remus looked at the time. “I think it’s time you got some sleep. We’ll talk again in the morning.”

Harry was tired, and snuggled beneath the covers and closed his eyes. Within minutes he was asleep. Remus transfigured his chair into something more comfortable and settled down to rest by his son.

17th February 1996

Lily was fed up. Ever since the incident in the Chamber, Remus had been avoiding her. Every time she'd tried to spend time alone with him, he'd had some excuse not to do so. Checking the time, she thought that he'd definitely be in bed by now and totally unable to avoid her. Also he'd believed she left for the weekend. Marching up to his rooms, Lily knocked on the door.

A few minutes later Remus pulled the door open, a gown wrapped round him. "Lily, is something wrong? You're not supposed to be here."

"I want to talk to you." Lily didn't wait to be invited in and pushed past him.

"It's almost midnight." Remus pointed out. "And I'm exhausted. If you remember it was a full moon just two nights ago."

"I'm well aware of that." Lily didn't move.

Remus sighed and shut the door. "Sit down."

Lily sat down. "Remus, I want to know why you're avoiding me."

"Lily, I'm tired and not really in the mood for this." Remus snapped.

Lily knew from his response that he was indeed avoiding her. "So you are avoiding me." Lily scowled. "Ever since we ended up in the Chamber, you've done everything you can to avoid me. Why?"

Remus knew that she wasn't going to leave him alone until he told her. "You honestly don't know?"

"No. Otherwise I wouldn't be asking, would I?" Lily was glad that he was finally admitting there was something wrong.

"I think you're still in love with Sirius." Remus accused.

“What?” Lily couldn’t believe her ears.

“I saw the two of you kissing, Lily.” Remus had been on his way to his interview with Minerva and had spotted the pair of them in a small room off the main hallway locked in what looked like a passionate embrace.

Lily let out a sigh. “It was just easier to let him kiss me than to keep fighting him. After what had happened, I just didn’t have the energy.”

Remus still wasn’t convinced. “When Harry was fighting Dumbledore, I saw you turn to him.”

Lily’s infamous temper started to surface. “What do you expect? I thought I was about to see my son die; I couldn’t bear to watch. I don’t think it would have gone down too well with Sirius if I’d marched across the room and asked you to hold me, now would it?” Lily stood up. “Sometimes you’re the most sensible man I know, and at other times you’re the most stupid. I’m off to bed.”

As he saw tears in Lily’s eyes, Remus knew then that his fears had been groundless. “Lily, I’m sorry.” He grabbed her wrist, stopping her from leaving. “It’s just that when I saw him with you like that, I wanted to kill him. Feeling the way I do about you, it hurt.”

Lily let out a deep breath. “He’s hurt me too, Remus.”

“And now I’ve hurt you as well.” Remus let go of her wrist when she pulled away. “I am sorry. I should have come and talked to you instead of letting my fears get to me.”

“As you pointed out to me before, Remus, you should have trusted me.” Lily headed towards the door. “Remus, we’re both going to have to work to make this relationship succeed because right now it feels as though all the odds are against us.”

“And I’ve just made things worse haven’t I?” Remus knew he’d made a huge mistake.

“You have.” Lily couldn’t cope with Remus’ insecurities as well as her own. “When you’ve gotten over your ridiculous idea about how I really feel about Sirius, you know where to find me.”

Remus watched as she walked out and closed the door, before snarling and throwing the cushion at it; angry at himself, not Lily.

One week later

Harry entered the room to find Remus, Lily, Neville, Jamie and Seville all waiting for him. “Sorry I’m late. I ran into Perfect Percy.”

Neville wondered why his sister was there. “I know you wouldn’t tell me anything earlier but why is Seville is here?”

Remus ignored Neville’s question. “Can you please tell Seville what we can’t?”

Neville realized Remus meant about Sirius. “Seville, Amicus is Sirius Black.”

“What?” Seville didn’t understand what was going on.

Lily put an arm around the girl. “Seville, what we’re about to show you are two memories of what happened on the afternoon your mother died.”

Seville’s face dropped. “We’re not going to see her die are we?”

“Absolutely not.” Remus reassured her. “But there’s something you need to know.”

“Why can’t you just tell us?” Neville didn’t want to enter the pensieve that was sitting on the table.

Harry sighed. “Please, Neville just trust us. You need to see this rather than hearing about it.”

“Okay.” Trusting Harry, Neville took Seville’s left hand and Jamie, her right.

All six then plunged into the memory. Lily halted it almost as soon as they entered. "This is the Chamber of Secrets."

Seville gasped. "It's huge."

"I know." Harry pointed to the statue of Slytherin. "It was built by him."

Neville was confused and pointed out to the Harry that was standing next to Jamie. "Err, Harry. I thought you slipped on your way down and was knocked out."

"That was a lie." Harry disclosed before turning to Seville. "The two men standing by Jamie and myself are Praeses and Amicus."

Seville was astounded. "Professor Black, your husband is a Death Eater."

"I know Seville." Lily answered quietly.

"Who's Praeses?" Seville wondered who the other man could be.

"I am." Remus informed her.

"Are you going to kill me and Nev?" Seville's voice was surprisingly steady.

"No." Neville jumped in to reassure his sister. "Professor Lupin's a good Death Eater."

Remus disagreed with Neville's assessment of him. "I wouldn't exactly call me good, but I am on your side."

"I'm going to continue the memory. It will switch to my viewpoint as soon as the Dark Lord enters." Lily could see Neville about to say something. "You'll understand why in a moment, Neville."

The group watched as Dumbledore, Lily, Alice and Voldemort entered. Seville turned to Jamie and hid her face as her mother was dragged in by the Dark Lord. Neville, however, continued to watch. Neville

thought he was going to faint when the Dark Lord passed his mother the vial. Watching the careful way the Dark Lord dealt with Alice, Neville knew why they'd wanted to show him the memory. "Stop it."

Lily paused the playback. "I'm sorry, Neville."

"She's Lamia, isn't she?" Neville had heard about Harry's memory of Voldemort's resurrection and had seen Jamie's interaction with her in the graveyard.

Lily nodded. "I'm afraid so."

"Lamia?" Seville didn't understand.

With tears in his eyes, Neville turned to face his sister. "You Know Who has a private guard made up of several lieutenants. Mum was one of them."

"Don't be ridiculous." Not wanting to acknowledge what Neville was saying, Seville scoffed at her brother. "Nothing so far has proved anything except that You Know Who has given Mum a potion."

"I'll continue the memory." Lily released it and Alice revealed her true alliance. Seville and Neville both fell silent; neither really wanting to watch but both unable to look away.

When Alice said that Seville wasn't Frank's daughter, Seville grimaced. "I'm Amicus' daughter aren't I?"

"No." Harry responded shortly as the memory continued to playing. When Voldemort walked up to Alice and claimed responsibility for her, Seville didn't burst into tears as everyone expected. "Just great. I'm the daughter of the most evil man alive."

Lily stopped the memory. "I thought you'd be more upset."

"It doesn't feel real even though I know it must be true." Seville admitted. "Right now I feel more disgusted at the idea that she used my blood to bring him back than upset at finding out that he's supposedly my father." Seville frowned. "Exactly how did she use it?"

Harry shook his head. "You don't want to know."

"I do, Harry." Seville needed to know.

Lily took point. "It took me quite some time but I did some research on it. Its a very old resurrection spell which requires a heart and blood. Alice used the heart from a Muggle girl to represent Voldemort's Muggle half, and..."

Seville interrupted her. "He's a half-blood?"

Harry nodded. "He is although he doesn't obviously advertise the fact."

"So I'm not really a pureblood am I?" Seville found she wasn't bothered.

"No." Lily then continued with how Voldemort had been brought back. "Your blood was used to represent his wizarding heritage. The spell was made all the more potent by the fact that you're his daughter and it was your mother who took part in his resurrection."

"And this resurrection made him whole again?" Seville felt dirty knowing that she'd somehow been a part of it, no matter how innocent she was of any wrongdoing.

"Not exactly." Jamie rolled up his sleeve to show Seville a long cut. "Your mother cut me and took blood from me. The cut never healed properly leaving a scar. The Dark Lord needed the blood of an enemy to bring him back to full health and complete the ritual."

Seville shuddered. "So You Know Who not only has my blood in him, but yours as well?"

Jamie nodded. "There's something else you should know."

Seville lifted a shoulder in a half-shrug. "It can't be much worse than I've already seen."

“I’m a Death Eater as well.” Jamie felt Seville stiffen before taking a step away from him.

“Nothing quite like keeping it in the family, is it?” Seville wanted to run but didn’t know how to get out of the memory.

“I wasn’t given any choice, Sev.” Jamie hoped that Seville wouldn’t reject him. “Please understand. The Dark Lord offered me a choice of dying or joining him. I didn’t want to die.”

Seville walked over to the frozen image of the man who she’d been just was told was her father. “He doesn’t even look scary. Why would anyone be frightened of someone who looks so ordinary?” She giggled almost hysterically. “What should I call him now? Daddy You Know Who?”

Lily realized that Seville was in shock. “Seville, you don’t need to call him anything.”

“But I do.” Seville snapped. “Because now Mum’s dead, I’ve a got a feeling Daddy Dearest is going to come calling, and he is, isn’t he?”

Remus nodded. “More than likely. It’s part of the reason we’ve shown you the memory.”

Neville, who had fallen silent, finally spoke up again. “What’s the other part?”

Lily answered the question. “Your Mum’s Will is being read this Friday. She’s appointed guardianship of the two of you to Sirius. Sirius has every intention of taking you home to Grimmauld Place with him when we break up for the Easter holidays.”

It was too much for Neville, and his stomach, which had been roiling ever since he’d discovered who Seville’s father was, rebelled. Harry rubbed his friend’s back as he fell to his knees. Remus pulled out his wand and cleaned up the mess. “We’re sorry Neville, but we thought you really needed to know.”

“I won’t go.” Neville wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

“Under wizarding law you won’t have any choice.” Sirius had spoken to Lily about it. “But I’ll do everything I can to protect you.”

“Thank you.” Seville felt frozen inside and responded automatically to Lily’s reassurances. “I’d like to see the rest of the memory now, please.”

Harry waited for Seville to say something when she found out who he was and was surprised when she said nothing and simply continued to watch transfixed as Harry battled Dumbledore. Lily halted the memory before Dumbledore pulled out his second wand. Neville looked at Lily. “Why stop it now?”

“Your mother’s death comes next.” Lily said gently.

“I want to see it.” Seville looked to her brother. “Nev?”

“Go ahead.” Neville was reeling from everything he’d learnt but needed closure.

“Very well.” Lily let the memory run.

At the end, Neville shook his head. “Why did she save Harry?”

“Because I outranked her.” Harry explained. “She’d sworn an oath to protect the Dark Lord, Dad and myself with her life. I didn’t know until Sirius told me.”

Seville looked down at her mother’s body, and felt nothing but hatred for her. “I’m glad she’s dead.”

“Sev!” Neville was disgusted with what he’d learnt but he still hadn’t wanted his mother dead.

“Neville, she slept with that thing and she used my blood to bring him back.” Seville didn’t care how upset Neville was. “She was never at home, and when she was, she never really had time for you. How many times have you not gotten what you wanted and all I needed to do was ask?”

Neville shook his head. "It wasn't because she didn't care about me, Sev. She was just busy and you were the baby."

"Neville, you heard her. She hated your father; obviously unlike mine. She only had time for me because I was his daughter." Seville pointed to the prone figure of Voldemort as he lay unconscious next to Harry on the floor. "Nev, I wept for her. I thought she'd died to save Jamie. If I'd known what she'd really done I wouldn't have wasted a single tear on her."

Neville was shocked. "But she was our Mum."

"She was a whore." Seville anger at her mother's betrayal spilled over. "And I hate her. I'll always hate her."

Lily waited for Seville to start to cry but the girl remained dry-eyed. "I think it's time we left the memory."

Everyone re-emerged, and Remus checked the warding on the Room before turning to Seville. "Seville, I know you probably don't need what I am about to do, but I have to try something. I won't hurt you but I'd like your permission first."

"Go ahead." Seville's voice sounded flat and emotionless.

"Relax and look at me." Remus pulled out his wand. "Legilimens."

Neville gasped as Remus was thrown backwards, his nose bleeding profusely. "What happened?"

"Your sister, like the Dark Lord, is a natural Occlumens." Remus had suspected she might be. "What happened to me was Seville's natural defense against my invasion of her mind."

Harry knew what was coming next. "Maman, if you would."

Lily concentrated and changed into Berus. Even though he knew it was just Lily, Neville hated snakes and backed hurriedly up. Harry hissed at Lily startling Neville. "Harry, you're speaking parseltongue."

Seville snorted. "Don't be ridiculous, Neville. He's speaking English."

Harry watched as Lily slid over to him and settled in a coiled ball at his feet. "Speak to her."

"Hello." Lily hissed at Seville, who immediately recoiled. Lily reverted to her natural state. "You understood me, didn't you?"

Seville nodded. "So I'm evil."

"No, you're not. I speak parseltongue as does Hermione." Harry reminded her. "And we're not evil."

Seville gave him a hard stare. "You could have fooled me, Harry."

"Okay then, Hermione isn't." Harry was a little hurt at Seville's comment.

Seville saw that she'd hurt Harry, and immediately regretted her harsh words. "I'm sorry Harry, but it's all been a bit of shock."

"It's okay, Seville." Harry then pulled Seville aside. "Hermione said that if you need to talk to her, let her know and she'll meet you here."

"Why would I want to talk to Hermione?" Seville was puzzled by the Slytherin's offer.

"Because she found out that Sirius is her father." Harry then quickly gave Seville details of what had happened to Hermione's mother.

"And he's going to be my guardian?" Seville felt her as if her skin was crawling.

Harry reluctantly nodded. "Jamie will be there. He'll do whatever he can to look after you, as will Maman."

Seville looked over to Lily who was talking quietly with Neville. "How does she stand it?"

“She’s dealing but it’s hard for her.” Harry sighed. “There’s a lot more you need to know but now isn’t the time. We’ll bring you back to the Room at some point and show you how Jamie and I both got involved in this circus.”

“I think I upset Jamie when we were in the memory.” Seville bit her lip nervously. “I didn’t mean to but I just wanted to lash out at someone.”

“I understand, as will Jamie.” Harry smiled encouragingly at the girl. “Seville, I know you aren’t happy about everything that’s happened but please give Jamie a chance to explain. He doesn’t want to be where he is now but he was telling the truth when he said he had no choice.”

Seville glanced across to where Jamie and Remus were standing, and nodded. “If Jamie can deal with who I am, then if what you say is true, it’s only fair I give him a chance.”

“Thanks.” Harry led Seville back over to Neville. “Take her back to Gryffindor.”

Seville stopped before leaving the room. “I won’t tell anyone about this.”

“We didn’t think you would.” Remus knew he wasn’t going to ask for Seville to swear an oath; after what he’d told her, he knew that she wouldn’t want the truth about her coming out.

After bidding Lily goodbye, Neville didn’t say anything to anyone else and led his sister out, Jamie following behind.

Harry turned to Remus. “Can I talk to you alone?”

Remus saw that Lily was about to leave. “Give me a minute, Harry.” Remus then hurried over to Lily before invoking a privacy bubble over them. “Lily, can we please talk about last week?”

“Now’s not a good time, Remus.” Lily dropped the spell before opening the door and letting herself out.

Remus span back round to face Harry. "What is it, Harry?" Remus sat down the large leather sofa that appeared in front of the brightly dancing fireplace.

"You really care about Maman, don't you?" Harry sat down next to his father.

Remus was confused by Harry's comment. "Of course I do. She's my friend."

Harry shook his head. "I don't mean like that. I saw your face in the memory when she turned to Sirius. For one moment I thought you looked hurt."

Remus hadn't realized that he'd let his feelings show. "If you must know, I'm in love with her. When I saw Lily turn to Sirius, I wanted to kill him. It didn't help when I saw them kissing afterwards."

"He is her husband." Harry pointed out.

"I'm well aware of that, Harry." Remus hated having Sirius' position in Lily's life being emphasized to him.

Harry knew what would happen if Sirius ever discovered the truth. "If he finds out, he'll kill you."

"I know." Remus was more than aware of what Sirius was likely to do. "Which is why we haven't taken it any further than just being friends at the moment."

"We?" Harry felt his stomach go over. "Maman feels the same way about you?"

Remus shrugged. "I don't really know. We've never discussed openly about how we feel about each other. I thought she might be in love with me until I accused her of still being in love with Sirius."

Harry really couldn't believe that Remus had even entertained the idea, let alone put it into words. "There's as much chance of that as of me falling in love with Pansy Parkinson."

Remus cringed. "I know that now. Lily read me the riot act about it. I'm still not sure where I stand with her as she still doesn't want to talk to me."

"Perhaps its better this way." Harry hated the idea of Remus crossing Sirius and being unable to defend himself.

"Harry, if it was you and Hermione, would you think it was better this way?" Remus watched Harry's face change.

"No, I wouldn't." Harry admitted. "I'm never going to feel about anyone else like I feel about Hermione."

"Now you know how I feel about Lily then." Remus shook his head. "After she finished with me when we were still at Hogwarts, I knew I was in love her. Over the years I never changed how I felt. When we stayed at Dae's and she irritated the hell out of me, I managed to convince myself that I'd fallen out of love with her but I was just fooling myself. Now I just don't know what's going to happen."

"I'm sorry, Dad." Harry knew what the repercussions of a relationship with Lily would be for his Dad.

"How is your Occlumency now? I wouldn't want Sirius to find out about us through you." Remus wondered if he'd need to obliviate Harry again.

"Quite good actually." Even though his training sessions with Severus had ended, Harry still practiced with him.

"Do you mind if I test you?" Remus hadn't tried for quite a while.

Harry thought it would be a good idea to show his Dad exactly how proficient he now was. "Go ahead."

Remus pulled out his wand. "Legilimens." He easily slipped into Harry's mind, only to find himself totally lost in what seemed to be a never-ending maze. Soon he was totally confused, up felt down and left like right. He soon withdrew. "Clever if you're trying to divert me

but let's try again. I need to be convinced that what I'm seeing is the truth. I'm going to try and find the memory of our discussion."

Harry relaxed. "Go ahead."

Remus repeated his last action, looking for his and Harry's conversation. Instead he was fluidly diverted to a memory of Harry chatting happily with Seville about quidditch. He withdrew. "Nice."

"Thanks." Harry was relieved. "At least I know now I can at least try and fool Sirius. It's you who needs to be careful in your relationship with Maman."

"Harry, speaking of being careful in relationships, I want you to take care with Hermione." Remus warned.

"Dad, I already know." Harry's blush gave him away.

"Harry, the Room is for studying and practicing only." Remus hoped that Harry would listen to him.

"I understand." Harry knew that Remus would have a meltdown if he ever found what he and Hermione had been getting up to in the Room.

"Let's go then." Remus led the way out.

One week later

Remus finished telling Seville the basic details about the Death Eaters and his family. "That just about covers everything you really need to know for the moment."

"I'm surprised Georgie wasn't more forgiving." Seville's best friend was usually the most generous of girls. "She bent over backwards to comfort Neville at the funeral."

"I'm not." Harry told her. "She was awfully upset about Dad, and I think she just couldn't bear to think that her perfect world wasn't so perfect anymore."

Seville sighed. "A bit like Neville."

"Are you still having trouble with him?" Harry looked worriedly at Remus.

Seville nodded. "He's pretty much stopped speaking to me."

"Do you want me to talk to him?" Remus asked.

Seville's face lit up. "Would you?"

Remus got up. "Of course I will."

Seville got up as well and impulsively hugged Remus. "Thanks Professor."

Remus hugged her back. "You're welcome, Seville." He then gently pushed her away from him so he could look at her. "If you need someone to talk to, even if it's late at night, I'll always be here."

Harry knew then that Remus had decided to take responsibility for Seville. "And I will, Seville."

"Hermione said the same." Seville felt comforted being surrounded by people she knew she could count on, even after they'd discovered who she was.

"I'll go speak to Neville now." Remus let himself out of the Room.

Harry turned to Seville. "How are you and Jamie getting along?"

"Alright, but he's treating me like spun glass." Seville blushed. "He hasn't even kissed me properly yet. He holds my hand and gives me a kiss on the cheek but nothing more than that."

After hearing from his brother how far Jamie had gone with Cho, Harry was a little surprised that Jamie hadn't gone much further with Seville than simply holding hands and the odd chaste kiss. "He

obviously really likes you, Seville. Perhaps he worried about blowing it after the Chamber.”

“Do you think it’s got anything to do with who I am?” Seville asked worriedly.

“No.” Jamie had spoken to Harry about Seville and had said that he didn’t give a damn who her parents had been. “Just give him a little time.”

Seville smiled shyly. “Thanks Harry.”

Harry decided to take Seville’s mind off what had gone on while they waited for Remus to return, and wished for a swimming pool. Seville gasped when a large blue pool appeared in the center of the Room. Harry smirked. “You’ll find a swimming costume in the room over there.”

Seville span round amazed to see a cabana style room had also appeared.

Harry laughed. “Last one in is a hippogriff.”

Seville dashed off, determined to beat Harry into the pool.

Neville hurried along to Professor Lupin’s office, wondering what he wanted.

Remus looked up from marking some essays that he'd started on as he waited for Neville. “Neville, take a seat.”

Remus put down his pen and locked the door before warding the room. “I’ve just been speaking to Seville. She said that the two of you aren’t speaking.”

Neville looked down at the table. Remus waited for Neville to say something, and when he didn’t, gently encouraged him. “You can tell me what’s bothering you. It will stay between you and me.”

"I can't bear to look at her." Neville's voice sounded small. "Because every time I do, I remember what our mother was, and who Seville's father is."

"It isn't Seville's fault, Neville." Remus sat down on the desk opposite where Neville was sitting. "She's hurting that you won't talk to her."

"I know but it doesn't change the way I feel. I thought I'd be alright with it, but I'm not." Neville had tears in his eyes as he looked at Remus. "She was my little sister and, even though Mum didn't make so much of an effort with me, it didn't bother me, because Mum took care of Sev. Now when I look at Sev, I remember that Mum didn't care about me because I was Frank's son and Sev is that thing's daughter."

Remus realized that like Georgie, Neville wasn't doing so well with knowing the truth. "Do you want me to oblivate you of the knowledge?"

"No, because eventually it's going to come out that Sev is his daughter and I'll have to go through all this again." Neville reasoned logically. "I love my sister but I can't bear to be near her right now. I'd like to transfer to another house."

Remus was dismayed. He knew that Seville was going to be heartbroken when she found out. "Are you sure I can't persuade you to change your mind?"

Neville shook his head. "Please can you arrange it?"

Remus nodded. "I'll get back to you."

With a heavy heart Remus headed back towards the Room. When he got there he found Harry and Seville involved in a water fight. Seville stopped as soon as she saw Remus, guessing from his face that Neville hadn't given him a good reception.

"Dad?" Harry climbed out of the pool and cast a drying spell on himself.

“Neville’s requested a move to another House; he can’t deal with the truth.” Seeing Seville’s face crumple, Remus held out his arms to the watersoaked girl, who dashed into them, and for the first time since finding out about her mother, started to cry. Remus picked her up and carried her over to the sofa that appeared, before placing her on his lap and rocking her.

Harry grabbed a blanket and cast the same drying spell he’d done on himself on Seville, and then covered her with a blanket before going to get dressed and leaving.

Remus stroked Seville’s hair. “Neville didn’t want to be obliterated of the knowledge, but I’m afraid I’m going to have to obliterate the knowledge of who Harry, Jamie and I are. I can’t risk leaving that knowledge in the hands of someone as upset as Neville.”

“How are you going to do it?” Seville buried her face in Remus’ chest, glad of the comfort he was offering.

“I’m not sure yet.” Remus had an idea but he knew he’d have to speak to Neville first. “I’m going to take you to spend the night with Professor Black as I don’t think it’s a good idea for you to return to Gryffindor.”

Seville clung desperately to him. “Please can I stay with you?”

Remus picked her up. “Of course.”

Minerva was walking up the corridor and spotted Remus easily carrying a clinging Seville back towards his rooms. “Remus, is she alright?”

“Just a little upset about her mother again.” Remus stopped. “She’s going to stay in Harry’s room tonight.”

“That’s fine. I’ll ask one of the house elves to bring her some clothing.” Minerva put a tentative hand on Seville’s arm. “If you need to take some time away from classes, that’s fine.”

"Thank you." Seville's muffled voice escaped from the depths of Remus' chest.

Remus continued on his way and carried Seville to his room. After tucking her up in Harry's bed, he closed the door and asked a house elf to fetch Neville for him.

Remus opened the door at Neville's knock. "Come in."

"Professor, have you arranged for my transfer?" Neville hovered just inside the door.

"I've considered your request and I'm afraid I'm going to have to deny it." Remus motioned for Neville to take a seat.

"You're going to obliviate me, aren't you?" Neville guessed.

Remus nodded. "I can't let you leave here with the knowledge of who I am."

"What about knowing about Seville?" Neville asked quietly.

"I'm going to let you keep the knowledge but I'm going to need an oath from you not to divulge it. If you try to, you'll be struck dumb." Remus waited as Neville did as he asked.

"What will I believe happened in the Chamber?" Neville tried to keep calm.

"That the story that Sirius told everyone was true. You'll know that your mother was a Death Eater but that she still gave up her life to save Jamie. You'll think that we told you about Seville, believing you should know." Remus could see that Neville probably wanted to run. "You won't remember being shown the memory."

Neville looked up at him. "Will I still be friends with Harry when you've finished obliterating me?"

Remus knew that Neville didn't really have any other friends. "You'll believe that you all study together but you won't remember that Harry is Alumno; the same goes for Jamie."

Neville felt frightened. "Do we really have to do this?"

"I'm afraid so." Remus apologized. "I'm sorry Neville but if you get upset about Seville and accidentally reveal anything about us, it will kill you. Seville has gone through enough without having to deal with that. I simply can't release you from the oath because it was sworn on your magic and your life."

Neville knew that Remus was right; he'd already thrown several accusations in Jamie's face about his only dating his sister because of who she was. Angry and hurt, Neville hadn't cared if anyone had been around. He was also aware that Remus was going to carry out the obliviation whether he wanted him to or not. "I'm ready."

"Obliviate." Remus carefully eradicated Neville's memories one by one, making suggestions as to alternative scenarios where necessary. By the time he was finished, Remus was exhausted but he began speaking as if the whole conversation about obliviation hadn't taken place. "As I was saying, Neville, I can't allow you to move to another house."

Neville shook his head. "But I can't face her, Professor."

"Just keep to yourself then, Neville." Remus suggested. "I also understand from your sister that you're also not happy about your guardianship being taken over by Healer Black."

Neville wanted to stay with his grandmother. "I know what Mum was but I've lost her and Seville so I'd like to stay with my Gran."

"I'll talk to Healer Black about it, then." Remus offered.

"Thanks Professor." Neville stood up. "I'm sorry to have bothered you."

Remus smiled. "It's no problem, Neville. Goodnight."

Remus waited for the door to close before calling out. "Seville, you can come out now."

A tearful Seville opened the door, and stepped into the sitting room. "How did you know?"

"There's something I haven't told you yet." Remus hoped she wouldn't panic. "But I'm a werewolf."

"Oh." Seville was shocked but not afraid. "But it's only a problem on a full moon, isn't it?"

Remus was relieved. "Yes. The rest of the month I'm just a grumpy old Death Eater."

Seville laughed through her tears. "I don't want to go to bed right now. Can I sit up and talk to you?"

"I'll get us some hot chocolate." Remus lit the fire and popped into his kitchenette before returning after a few minutes with two large mugs, one tea and one chocolate. He passed the chocolate to Seville. "So what do you want to talk about?"

March 16th 1996

"Harry, don't stop." Hermione implored, as Harry lifted his head from kissing her collarbone.

Harry leant his forehead against Hermione's cheek. "Hermione, we have to."

Hermione ran her hands over Harry's bare back making him shiver. "I don't want to."

At her words, Harry dropped his head and began kissing her collarbone again before starting to move towards her breast, making Hermione whimper loudly.

Remus had been unable to find Harry and had wanted to warn him that the Dark Lord was going to require his attendance at Villa Laurifer over the Easter holidays. Guessing that he was probably studying with Hermione in the Room, he headed that way. Outside the Room, Remus walked up to the door and tried the handle, only to find the door was locked. Wondering if Harry was indeed in the Room, Remus sniffed the air and swore under his breath. Using the password that came with being the Deputy Head, Remus unlocked the door and opened it to find his son and Hermione lying on a large four poster bed, both too engrossed in what they were doing to have even noticed him. "Harry Remus Lupin."

Harry and Hermione's heads both snapped round. Harry cursed at the sight of his Dad framed in the doorway. "Shit."

"I'd say that covers what you're in." Remus entered the Room and turned his back on the pair. "You've got two minutes to make yourselves presentable."

Harry handed Hermione her blouse and picked up his own clothes from the floor before sliding back into his trousers and pulling on his shirt.

"Are you both decent?" Remus asked as the rustle of clothing ceased.

"Yes, Dad." Harry put his arm around Hermione to reassure her.

Remus turned round, a grim look on his face. "Exactly what did we discuss about this Room last month, Harry?"

"About only using the Room for studying." Harry knew he was in deep trouble.

"And does making love to your girlfriend come within that description?" Remus' voice was soft.

Harry gulped at the soft voice Remus was using. "No, Sir, but..."

"I don't want to hear any excuses." Remus still didn't raise his voice. "You're not even sixteen yet."

"But I am really because of the time spent at Dae's." Harry tried to point out.

"I suggest you shut up now, Harry." Remus advanced on his son. "I might have expected this sort of behavior from someone like me but never from you."

Hermione interrupted him. "It's my fault, Professor."

"Hermione, it takes two for consensual sex." Remus knew his words would embarrass her.

"But we haven't, you know." Hermione could feel her face burning.

Remus hid his relief. "That may be so but that's where what you two were doing was going to lead. The Room is off limits until I decide you can both be trusted again."

"But it's the only place I get to see Hermione." Harry protested.

"You should have thought of that before you decided to use it for your fun." Remus wasn't going to give in to Harry's entreaty. "You will also both have detention with Professor Prewett for the whole of next week."

"But Papa will want to know why." Hermione suddenly felt very scared.

Remus didn't want Severus finding out what they'd been up. He knew that Severus wouldn't be as lenient as him. "I will tell him that I caught you two practicing Dark Magic without my say so."

"Papa will still kill us." Hermione could feel tears threatening.

Remus refused to give in. "The choice is yours. You can tell him the truth if you want to."

Hermione knew she couldn't do that. "I'd prefer not to Professor."

"In that case both of you get your things and leave. Don't let me catch you two together in here again until I give you permission to do so. If I find you in here before then, I will tell Severus what happened today. Do I make myself clear?" Remus didn't need having to deal with libidinous teenagers on top of everything else that was going on.

"Yes, Sir." Harry squeezed Hermione's arm before letting go of her. "You go ahead."

Hermione picked up her book bag and fled, glad to escape from Remus' scrutiny.

As soon as the door shut, Remus turned on Harry. "Just what the bloody hell were you thinking?"

"I wasn't." Harry admitted. "We got carried away."

"Harry, I thought you had more sense. As well as your detention with Prewett, you will have a detention with me on the following Monday for use of bad language. I'm more than disappointed in you." Remus pointed towards the door. "Now go."

Harry dropped his head and opened the door. "I'm sorry, Dad."

"I know you are." Remus sat down heavily on the bed.

A few minutes later Lily let herself in; her face becoming cold as she spotted the rumpled bed. "What's going on?"

Remus realized that he hadn't bothered to dispel the bed. "It's not what you think. I caught Harry and Hermione in it."

"Oh Merlin." Lily sat down next to Remus. "I thought you'd had a word with him."

"I did." Remus defended himself. "Just last month and Harry chose to ignore my warning."

Lily knew that Remus would have punished both children. "What did you do to them?"

"I've banned them from using the Room together and given them a week's detention with Perfect Percy." Remus grinned. "I did think about sending them to you but I knew Percy would be more effective."

"And what are they going to tell Severus?" Lily knew that Severus would blame Harry rather than Hermione.

"That they've been practicing Dark Magic without supervision." Remus ran a hand through his hair. "Lily, we've got a bigger problem than Harry and Hermione right now. I've found out what the Dark Lord has planned for Hogwarts."

"And?" Lily felt her stomach go over.

"I can't tell you." Remus could see Lily was frustrated by his answer.

Lily was a little dismayed. "So I could have a death warrant on my head, and you wouldn't be able to tell me."

"You could, but so far as I know, you haven't." Remus tried to reassure her. "Lily, for now there's nothing you can do but wait."

Lily scowled. "Bloody brilliant."

Remus suddenly wondered what she was doing in the Room. "Lily, why are you here?"

"Dudley said that you'd been called, and I was worried." Lily admitted. "Minerva said she'd seen you heading this way. I just presumed that you'd come here."

"There's no need to be worried." Remus dragged her onto his lap, glad that they'd made up. "I'm in a far better position now than I've ever been."

Lily put a hand on his face. "I still worry."

Remus twisted his head to kiss the center of Lily's palm. "I know."

Lily shivered slightly as her palm tingled. "I'm always going to worry about you."

Remus kissed her before picking her and placing her on the floor. "Come on, we need to get out of here before I end up doing what I've just told Harry off for."

Lily smiled. "I wouldn't complain."

"That's the problem." Remus swatted her lightly on her bottom. "Now let's go."

Chapter 62: Relationships

Easter

Lily came up out of the cellar carrying a bottle of red wine, only to let it crash to the floor when she saw who was standing in the kitchen.

“Lady Black, I do believe I startled you.” Voldemort smirked at her.

“Lord Voldemort.” Lily had agreed to address him correctly simply to keep the peace with Sirius.

Sirius wasn’t happy with Lily. “Perhaps I should get another bottle of wine.”

Lily felt her stomach go over at being left alone with the Dark Lord. Voldemort smiled nicely, before giving an order couched as a request. “I believe my daughter is upstairs. I’d like to see her.”

Lily decided it would be better if she fetched Seville, and not Sirius. “I’ll go get her, and bring her into the sitting room.”

Seville groaned a little as Lily woke her up. “Seville, sweetheart, you need to get up.”

“What is it?” Seville asked a little groggily.

“It’s time.” Lily watched as Seville came fully awake.

Despite her brave words previously, Seville was suddenly petrified. “Aunt Lily, I’m not sure I can do this.”

“I’ll stay with you.” Lily promised. “Let me transfigure your pajamas into something more suitable.”

Seville let Lily help her before swallowing hard. “I suppose we’d better go down then.”

Lily led the way into the sitting room where Voldemort was sitting with Sirius enjoying a glass of wine. Seville shrank back against Lily, who

put an arm protectively around her chest. "Seville, this is Lord Voldemort."

Seville thought her heart was going to jump out of her chest. Voldemort got up and walked over to her and smiled. "You don't need to fear me, my dear. I'm your father."

Seville didn't exactly believe that she had nothing to fear. "Aunt Lily and Professor Lupin have already told me who you are."

Voldemort was pleased. "Come in and sit down."

Lily led Seville to the seat closest to the fire, and stood behind her with a hand on her shoulder. Voldemort smiled pleasantly at his daughter. "Is there anything you'd like to ask me?"

Seville swept a brief glance over at Sirius before shaking her head.

Voldemort noticed the almost imperceptible fleeting look. "Sirius, Lily, please leave me and my daughter alone."

Lily knew that she was going to get into trouble for it but she refused to budge. "Seville, do you want me to stay?"

Even though she was frightened, Seville wasn't willing to show that to this man and shook her head. "I'll be fine, Aunt Lily."

Sirius grabbed Lily by the arm and hauled her out of the room before shutting the double doors behind them.

Voldemort turned back to Seville after the couple had left. "You don't like Sirius very much do you?"

Seville lifted her chin. "No."

"Why not?" Voldemort knew that Sirius had treated his daughter well in the few days that she'd been at Grimmauld Place.

"I just don't." Seville knew that she couldn't tell him the truth.

“What about Lady Black?” Voldemort tried to get her to open up.

“She’s very nice.” Seville dropped her head again, not wanting to look at him. “But I’d rather be at Longbottom House.”

“I’m afraid you can’t return there as I wouldn’t be allowed to visit, especially as I understand your brother hasn’t taken too well to learning about who you really are.” Voldemort could see getting Seville to talk to him was going to be an uphill battle. “I’m sure Professor Lupin and Lady Black explained that.”

At the mention of Remus’ name, Seville’s face relaxed. “Professor Lupin did. He’s really nice.”

Voldemort filed the information away. “I already know how well you are performing academically, and so I would like to know what subjects you enjoy.” Voldemort tried to pick a topic that he hoped Seville would talk to him about.

His ploy worked as Seville pulled a face. “Defense Against the Dark Arts was my favorite class until Professor Prewett took over. He doesn’t let us do any practical lessons and said that we can learn what we need to from a book. If it wasn’t for Jamie, I wouldn’t be doing very well.”

Voldemort hid his annoyance at Prewett. “Is there anything else you like?”

“I love history and I like quidditch but I couldn’t get onto the house team as Gryffindor have a full complement already.” Seville enjoyed flying; something Neville didn’t.

“What broom do you currently own?” Voldemort knew from Alice that Seville had received a new broom for Christmas, but not which one.

“A Nimbus 2003.” Seville hadn’t touched it since her mother died. “Alice bought it for Christmas.” Seville pretty much refused to call Alice by anything other than her first name anymore.

Voldemort sighed. “I’m very sorry about your mother, Seville.”

Seville decided she wasn't going to lie. "I'm not."

Voldemort was stunned at the look of dislike that crossed Seville's face. "She cared a great deal for you."

"Something she made blatantly obvious." Seville could feel her temper rising at the thought of her mother. "Just as she made it equally obvious that Neville was little more than an inconvenience to her. She cared more about us and her work than she did my brother."

Voldemort had to admit that Seville had a point. To a certain extent, Alice had resented Neville because of Frank but he knew that despite that, she had still loved her son. Deciding to try and defuse Seville's anger towards Alice, Voldemort decided to discuss Alice's work. "Caring about her work was what made Alice a wonderful healer."

"Who just happened to be a murdering Death Eater on the side." Seville snapped, in her anger forgetting who she was talking to.

Voldemort frowned. "Your mother was one of my most loyal servants, and as such, I had a great deal of respect for her, as should you."

Seville climbed to her feet as her anger began to overwhelm her. "I hate her, and, I don't care who you are. Nothing you say will change the way I feel about her."

Voldemort also climbed to his feet. "Seville, as your father I expect you to treat me with respect."

"I hardly know you." Seville snapped at him as she put her hands on her hips.

"It should be enough that I'm your father." Voldemort let his irritation at his daughter seep into his voice. "I'm willing to let your behavior slide this time, but next time I will not be so lenient. Do you understand?"

Seville scowled. "Yes."

“That would be yes, sir.” Voldemort instructed. “Seville, I don’t want our relationship to start out on the wrong footing but I want to make it clear now, that even though you are my daughter, and as such have more far leeway than anyone else, I will punish you should you go too far.”

As Voldemort loomed over her, an angry look on his face, Seville once more became aware of whom she was dealing with. “You’d put me under the Cruciatus?”

“No.” Voldemort shook his head. “But I won’t hesitate to deprive you of your privileges.”

Seville simply shrugged. “I’m not bothered about privileges.”

“In that case, I could always ask Sirius to take you to the Black Estate where the two of you can be alone, so that Sirius can drill some manners into you.” Voldemort threatened.

Seville knew that Sirius probably wouldn’t hesitate to use the Cruciatus to get his point across, and she hurriedly apologized. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

“Then sit down, and try to show some decorum.” Voldemort sat back down himself, and tried to put the conversation back onto a more pleasant footing. “I’d like you to visit Villa Laurifer before you return to school.”

Seville didn’t want to. “Would I have to go alone?”

“No. Sirius or Jamie will accompany you.” Voldemort answered before deciding to test her abilities, and finished off his sentence in parseltongue. “Or perhaps you’d prefer Professor Lupin to escort you instead?”

“I would, thank you.” Seville answered in parseltongue without realizing it.

“Good, you’ve inherited my ability.” Voldemort was pleased.

Seville then felt a slight pressure in her head and pushed back. Voldemort didn't fall to the floor; nor did he endure a nosebleed as Remus had but instead simply nodded his head. "You are also a natural Occlumens; another trait we share."

Thinking about sharing things, she thought about how Voldemort marked his subjects, and wondered if she fell under that category. "I wouldn't be expected to take the Dark Mark would I?"

"Not unless you wanted to." Voldemort hoped she would eventually decide to take it. "I would, however, expect you to mark your own subjects. Sirius will be able to show you how."

Not liking the idea of Sirius showing her anything, or even wanting to discuss it, Seville faked a yawn. "Excuse me."

"It's late." Voldemort stood up. "You should return to your bed, and I'll see you again before you return to school."

Seville simply nodded. "Alright."

Voldemort escorted his daughter to the doors and placed a hand on her shoulder, before addressing a subject Seville had wanted to avoid. "I would like for you to call me father when we are alone, as we are now. Otherwise you may call me Lord Voldemort or my Lord."

Seville hid her repugnance at being touched by him, before forcing out the words she knew he was waiting to hear. "Goodnight then, Father."

"Goodnight, Seville." Voldemort pulled open the doors and led Seville to the kitchen where he had a feeling that Lily would be anxiously waiting for the girl.

Lily got up as soon as Seville appeared in front of her. "Do you need anything, Seville?"

"No, thanks, Aunt Lily. I'd just like to go to bed." Seville hurriedly started to walk towards the stairs.

Lily turned to the two men. "If you'll both excuse me, I'll take Seville back to her room."

Voldemort turned to Sirius. "Your wife is very protective of my daughter."

"She's the same with any child." Sirius admitted. "I'm sorry Lily didn't leave when she was ordered to."

"It's okay, Sirius." Voldemort reassured him. "I'm glad to see that someone cares enough for Seville to stand up to me."

Sirius was relieved that Voldemort wasn't angry with his wife. "Seville's being well taken care of."

"I don't doubt it." Voldemort told him. "I want to see Seville again before she returns to school. Lily may bring her to Villa Laurifer when she begins work for me next week. I'll make arrangements."

Sirius bowed. "My Lord."

Voldemort apparated out.

Hearing footsteps, Sirius turned around to see Lily returning, and reached out to grab her arm as she went to push past him. "I'm sorry, Lily."

"Take your hands off me." Lily stood still until Sirius released her.

"Is Seville alright?" Sirius asked.

"She was understandably a little unnerved, so I've given her a dreamless sleep potion." Lily coldly informed him. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going out into the conservatory."

Sirius narrowed his eyes. "But it's almost midnight."

"It's not as if anyone's going to hurt me in there." Lily said in a scornful tone.

"I've said I was sorry." Sirius snapped, his patience growing thin with Lily.

"And I've accepted your apology." Lily told him in a quiet, steady voice. "I just need some fresh air."

"I'll see you in bed." Sirius let her go.

Lily made her way into the conservatory and sat down on a bench, glad of the tranquility in the room. Rolling up her sleeve she looked at the purple fingerprints that had started to form on her arm. She knew that she couldn't put up with Sirius and his Jekyll & Hyde behavior for much longer. Wanting Remus but unable to go to him, Lily decided to do some baking; hopefully by the time she'd finished, Sirius would be asleep.

In Grimmauld Square, Remus felt a twinge of pain and rolled over. After looking at the time, he cursed and hurriedly got dressed before apparating out.

Voldemort called out for Remus to enter as a knock sounded on his outer doors. "I'm sorry to wake you up so late at night."

Remus shook his head. "It's quite alright, my Lord."

"I need to talk to you about Seville." Voldemort passed a glass of scotch to Remus who took it before sitting down.

Remus still hadn't gotten used to Voldemort treating him like a friend. "You've met her?"

"I've just returned from Sirius' home." Voldemort sat down, a glass of red wine in his hand. "She's not very happy living with Sirius."

"I'm sorry to hear that." Remus wasn't entirely surprised.

"She did, however, express her favor of you and Lady Black." Voldemort lit his fire and relaxed as heat quickly began to spread towards his seat. "After giving it some thought, I've decided that I'd like you to consider taking over her guardianship."

"I'd be delighted to become her guardian." Remus hadn't expected such a request, but he'd have done anything to remove Seville out from Sirius' aegis. "Will Sirius have a problem with it?"

"Sirius will do as he's told." Voldemort made another decision. "And as from tonight, your first loyalty will no longer be to me. I'd like you to become Seville's bodyguard as well as her guardian. Your mask will be altered to reflect the change but you'll still retain the same privileges as you do now."

Remus would have defended Seville no matter what Voldemort had requested. "Thank you for the honor, My Lord. I will do everything I can to ensure your daughter's well-being."

"Excellent." Voldemort then reached out to pick up the papers that were sitting on the side table next to him. "While you're here, we may as well go over my plans for Diagon Alley, Hogwarts and the Ministry."

Remus realized that it was going to be a long night.

One week later

Harry wrapped his arm around Seville's waist, and pulled her tightly against him. "Are you ready?"

"Are you sure you can apparate us both?" Seville was terrified. Lily was supposed to have been accompanying her but instead was in bed sick with Muggle measles she'd managed to catch after visiting patients at St. Mungo's.

Harry turned Seville's head to drop a kiss on her forehead. "I'll look after you."

Luna knocked on Seville's door and stuck her head round, only to draw back at the sight of Seville being held in such an intimate embrace by Harry. "Am I interrupting something?"

“Harry’s taking me to Villa Laurifer.” Seville watched as Luna’s face relaxed.

“You’re going to see him, aren’t you?” Luna knew that Seville didn’t really want to go.

“I don’t really have a lot of choice.” Seville reminded her newly found friend.

“Of course you don’t.” Luna walked over and squeezed Seville’s shaking hand. “Just calm down and you’ll be fine. Just think, if Harry here annoys you, you can ask your father to kick his butt.”

Seville relaxed and laughed. “Thanks, Luna.”

Harry stuck out his tongue at his friend. “Yeah thanks Luna.”

Seville was glad that she’d got such good friends. “I still find it hard to believe that you’ve all been so kind to me. After Neville...” Her voice trailed off.

“Perhaps he’ll come round.” Luna squeezed Seville’s hand again.

Seville shook her head. “I don’t think he will. He barely speaks to me now unless it’s to make some sort of rude comment about my parentage.”

Harry frowned. “I’m going to have to speak to him about that.”

“You won’t hurt him will you?” Seville didn’t want anything to happen to Neville, despite his actions.

Harry kissed Seville on the forehead again in an effort to reassure her. Since she’d moved in a few days earlier, he’d taken over the role of protector to her. “Of course not; he’s your brother, even if he isn’t exactly acting like a good one at the moment.”

“Well it isn’t every day you find out your sister is the product of a Death Eater and the Dark Lord, now is it?” Seville wanted to give Neville the benefit of the doubt.

“Maybe so, but as your brother, he should be a lot kinder to you.” Harry winked at Luna, who let go of Seville’s hand. Harry then retightened his arm around Seville. “Take a deep breath.”

Seville did as he asked, and she gasped as she emerged at the other end. “Where are we?”

“My rooms.” Harry let go of her. “Normally if I’d tried to do that with you without the necklace you’re wearing, you’d have been ripped to shreds by the wards; it’s a safety guard in case someone tries to apparate here by grabbing on to me.”

Seville fingered the necklace that Voldemort had sent for her. “And you didn’t think to tell me about that until now.”

“We could have come via the main apparition point where everyone else apparates into but I think the Dark Lord wished to spare you that.” Harry picked up a mask from his table. “This is for you.”

Seville looked at it with distaste. “Do I have to?”

“Afraid so.” Harry slipped on his own mask and watched as Seville gave a small shiver. “It’s still only me behind this.”

“I know but it’s really creepy looking at you in that.” Seville admitted.

“You’d better put yours on, Sev.” Harry handed over the mask he was holding.

Seville slipped it on, trying to bury the panic she was feeling. “Will you hold my hand?”

Harry shook his head. “I can’t Sev. If anyone sees it wouldn’t look good.”

“Okay.” Seville bravely stepped towards the doors. “Shall we go then?”

Harry opened the doors and ushered Seville out into the corridor, before leading her the short distance to Voldemort's rooms. Harry tapped softly on the door and a voice beckoned him to come in.

Seville felt her stomach go over when she entered the room. She'd expected to see Voldemort alone but the room was full of silver masked Death Eaters and a woman she recognized as Bellatrix Lestrange, who was holding a small baby.

Voldemort didn't move and Seville walked over to where he stood, and as Harry had instructed her to, curtsied.

Harry then followed her over and bowed. "My Lord."

Afterwards Harry stood as far away as he could from the Dark Lord as he watched him introduce Seville as his heir to everyone before leading her into an antechamber next door. Fifteen minutes later she returned.

Seville made her way over to Harry. "You're to escort me out; Jamie's free to leave as well."

Jamie and Harry were both glad of the reprieve. Harry gently reminded her about the mask. "You need to put on your mask."

Seville slipped it on and hurried out after the two boys, who led her back up the corridor to Harry's rooms. Once inside, Harry threw his mask onto the table. "You can take the mask off now."

Seville dropped hers onto the floor. "I hate that thing."

"Join the club." Jamie took off his own mask, before grinning playfully at his brother. "I bet Harry didn't tell you that these rooms were to have been yours."

"How come you got them?" Seville asked Harry.

"Because I'm Sirius' protégé and he's your father's favorite." Harry watched Seville shudder at the mention of Sirius. He then waved his

arm to encompass the rooms. "Would you like these rooms back? I can always move out."

Seville shook her head. "No, you keep them. I'm sure Lord Voldemort will find me some others." Seville hoped never to need rooms at Villa Laurifer.

"Thanks." Harry didn't care either way as he too would have been happy to never need the rooms again.

Seville was glad to be able to relax. "Harry, why didn't you take off your mask in the room? Jamie and the others all did once I'd entered, except for Sirius of course."

"Because I'm not allowed to remove my mask in front of anyone." Harry suddenly realized he hadn't actually told Seville why he couldn't.

"No-one's told me why yet." Seville leant back against the sofa behind her.

"Because as I've already told you, I'm destined to become Sirius' successor. I'd hardly be frightening as a killer if people knew who I really was." Harry said matter-of-factly. "Sirius intimidates by fear of the unknown."

Seville understood. "You're quite right. I certainly wouldn't be afraid of you."

Harry pulled a silly face at her. "But I'm a big, bad nasty piece of work."

It had the effect that Harry had been looking for. Seville gurgled with laughter. "I'm more scared of your sister."

Harry knew she meant Auri. "I'm glad." Harry walked over to the table. "You two can stay here as long as you want to but I need to get back. I promised Maman I'd drop by."

"But she's got Muggle measles Harry." Jamie pointed out. "You might get sick."

"I've already had Muggle measles, Jamie." Harry picked up his mask. "I'll see you both at Grimmauld Square later. Jamie, when you're ready to go, you can apparate directly from here into Seville's room if you want to." Harry then disappeared.

Seville turned to Jamie. "Can we go now?"

Jamie stood up and held out his arms to Seville who gladly went into them. "Hold tight." He then accioed Seville's mask to him and apparated them both out.

As soon as they arrived back, Seville turned and buried her face in Jamie's chest. "I never want to go back there again. I can't believe You Know Who introduced me to Bellatrix Lestrange knowing that she murdered Neville's father."

"I thought you knew she hadn't." Jamie led Seville over to the sofa that graced the sitting area of her bedroom.

"No." Seville hadn't been informed. "If she didn't, then who did?"

Jamie hurried to fill her in. "Dumbledore. The Dark Lord found out when Bella said that she knew she'd murdered Frank but she didn't know why and it felt wrong. The Dark Lord used Legilimency on her and found out that someone very powerful had messed with her mind. It didn't take a genius to figure out who."

Seville felt a little better about Bella after that but not much. "Why is she living there with the baby? I wouldn't exactly think that that place is suitable for a child."

"She's got nowhere else to go at the moment. Dad would take her in if he could." Jamie explained.

"I hate all this." Seville felt as if her life had been turned topsy-turvy since Alice's death. "I can't wait to get back to school."

“Me neither.” Jamie slid his arm around Seville, and decided to distract her from the unsavory subject. “I can’t believe I never saw you as anything other than Nev’s little sister until last year.”

“Well, up until last year, I saw you as nothing but a bigheaded idiot.” Seville teased him.

“Thanks!” Jamie gently brushed Seville’s fringe out of the way. “You’re so pretty.”

Seville blushed. “I don’t think so.”

“Well you’d be wrong then.” Jamie leant over and kissed his girlfriend lightly on the lips before pulling away.

“Why don’t you ever kiss me properly?” Seville felt a little frustrated.

“You’ve been through such a lot and I didn’t want to pressure you into doing anything you didn’t want to.” Jamie confessed.

Seville felt her heart melt. “Jamie, you idiot. You can kiss me properly. If you overstep the mark, I’ll tell you.”

Jamie, who’d done a lot more than just kiss Cho, suddenly felt his palms begin to get sweaty at the thought of simply kissing Seville. “Okay.”

Seville closed her eyes. Jamie hesitated before lowering his head and gently covering Seville’s lips with his own. As Jamie felt Seville relax, he let his tongue flicker slightly across her bottom lip. Seville opened her mouth in response to the gentle caress and Jamie deepened the kiss, sliding his arms around her. A little unsure of herself, Seville tried to imitate what Jamie was doing until she eventually broke off the kiss, gasping for air.

Jamie kissed her on her forehead and hugged her. “I’ll always take care of you, Sev.”

Feeling blissfully happy after her first real kiss, Seville hugged him back. “I know you will, Jamie.”

At Grimmauld Place, Harry poked his head around Lily's door. "Maman, how are you feeling?"

"A little less itchy. I'll be able to return to Hogwarts on time." Lily patted the bed she was lying on. "I really don't need to be in bed but I don't want to spread this to the others."

Harry cast a privacy spell. "So how did you do it?"

Lily smirked at her son. "Easy; I simply went into the quarantined section of the hospital and did a transference spell when I found someone with something I'd never had. I knew Sirius had never had Muggle measles so I picked that."

"Clever." Harry applauded Lily's ingenuity, before turning to the real reason he'd visited Lily. "I thought I'd drop by and tell you that Seville managed okay today."

Lily felt guilty for leaving the girl to go alone but she and Remus had discussed it before she'd gone to the hospital to try and infect herself with something. "Did Jamie take care of her?"

Harry shook his head. "No, I did. I apparated her there and Jamie is going to return with her. Actually, they're probably back at Grimmauld Square by now."

Lily was relieved to hear that Seville had coped alright. "I'm glad. I did feel bad about leaving her to go alone."

"It's better this way. At least you haven't had to start work for the Dark Lord as you should have done." Harry put a hand over Lily's. "Was Sirius mad when he found out about the Muggle measles?"

"Not at me, he wasn't." Lily had pleaded innocence at walking into a quarantined area. "The head doctor got a bit of a talking to though."

"Better someone getting a tongue-lashing than you having to work for the Dark Lord." Harry wouldn't have believed that Lily's plan could

have been so effective. "Who'd have thought that the Dark Lord had never had the Muggle measles?"

"I didn't even think about him when I did it; it was more to keep Sirius away from me than anything else." Lily smiled at Harry.

Harry got up. "I'd better be off. I'm meeting Hermione to take her into Muggle London."

"Please be careful." Lily warned him. "And no repetition of your previous behavior!"

"Dad would kill me if he caught me again." Harry reassured Lily.

"Off you go then." Lily kissed Harry on the cheek, before he apparated out.

Harry met Hermione just outside the Leaky Cauldron. He laughed out loud at her raincoat and sunglasses. "I knew I should never have taken you to see a Muggle spy movie."

Hermione lowered her glasses. "I was trying to be incognito."

Harry put an arm around her waist. "Let's go."

The pair of them apparated to the Potter Estate. Harry knew that Remus wouldn't be happy if he'd known but Harry simply wanted to spend some time alone with Hermione, and this was the only place he knew they'd be safe.

July 20th 1996

Harry flopped onto his bed. Pasha appeared. "Master Harry staying here tonight, not Potter Estate?"

Harry nodded. "Dad doesn't know that I've been going to the Potter Estate, so I think it's best if it stays between us."

Pasha liked the idea of being entrusted with a secret of her master. "Pasha keeps secret, Master Harry."

Harry smiled at the house-elf. "I knew you would."

A knock sounded at Harry's door. "Come in."

Lily put her head around the door. "I've just finished packing for Anna so that she can go off to the Goyles for a month, and I thought I'd do the same for you before you disappear off again."

"I think I can manage to do my own packing. I'm going to be here for a few days, and then I'm going to stay with George Weasley for a couple of weeks." Harry grinned. "His Dad is really excited. I think he's probably already got a list of the things he wants to discuss with me that are Muggle oriented."

Lily laughed. "I'll be seeing you next weekend then. We've been invited to Nym's engagement party."

Harry pulled Lily down to sit by him. "How are things with you and Sirius?"

"Bearable." Lily gave a small smile. "Thankfully I only really have to see him when he takes me to Villa Laurifer. Between Voldemort and Craig, he's being kept kind of busy."

"How are you getting on with the work that the Dark Lord has asked you to do?" Harry knew that Voldemort had Lily working on new warding techniques.

"Slowly." Lily smirked. "Very slowly."

"Watch yourself." Harry knew that Voldemort would eventually catch onto Lily's game.

"I am being careful, Harry." Lily reassured him. "I've made sure that I'm making small but significant steps. If I can just delay finding a solution until after the annual leave at the Ministry has gone by, I'll be happy."

Both Lily and Harry now knew when Voldemort was planning to attack. Harry hugged her. "As long as you make sure he doesn't suspect anything."

"Hopefully he won't." Lily stood up. "I'm going to pop in and see your Dad before I leave."

Harry gave her a naughty smile. "Have a good time."

"Harry!" Lily playfully clipped Harry around the head. "We're just friends and you know it."

"For the moment." Harry hugged Lily before picking up a letter that had come from school. "Did you know that they've asked me to replace Boot as a prefect? I think I'm going to refuse though; I've just got too much going on."

Lily was a little disappointed. "Which is why Remus told them not to pick you last year."

Harry picked up the response he'd written to Professor McGonagall. "I've said that perhaps Draco might be a better choice."

Lily's face brightened. "I'm sure he would be."

"So am I." Harry folded up the letter. "And he'll get on well with Su Li."

"I really must go. I'll see you at Nym's party." Lily kissed Harry's cheek. "Sirius shouldn't be calling you too much. Craig is sending him to Europe for a month to lecture starting next week."

Harry laughed. "Maybe that will help the Dark Lord delay his plans if nothing else."

"I doubt it." Lily pulled open the door. "Do you want me to send your birthday present to the Weasleys?"

"I can wait for it until I come back." Harry assured her. "I'll see you soon."

“Bye.” Lily closed the door behind and headed downstairs to look for Remus.

August 11th 1996

With Sirius in Europe, Lily found herself having to visit Villa Laurifer a lot less. Also because her research was going slower than Voldemort would have liked, he'd delayed his attack on the Ministry, particularly as all holiday leave there had been cancelled. Even though Voldemort had lain low, the odd sighting of Death Eaters had made the Ministry nervous, and they'd acted accordingly.

Remus, therefore, found himself with plenty of time to spare, and with Sirius away, he'd taken to dragging Lily out to watch Muggle movies. Remus finished kissing Lily just as the credits rolled for Independence Day. “I might actually get to see a movie all the way through one day.”

Lily giggled as she followed him out of the cinema. “It's the only place we can get any privacy without anyone seeing us.”

Remus slid his arm around her waist. “I've got an idea. Would you like to visit the Potter Estate?” He didn't know why he hadn't thought of it before.

“Will we be able to get past the wards? My access was revoked after I remarried.” Lily was tempted at seeing where she'd lived for a short time but was also a little nervous as well.

“Harry and I have both got access to it.” Remus pulled Lily up an alley at the side of the cinema, before apparating them both to the gates of the Potter Estate.

Lily waited while Remus placed his hand on the lodestone and keyed Lily into the wards. “Come on, it's safe for you now.”

Lily walked through the gates with Remus, and they both started the long trek up the pathway to the main house. On arriving at the entrance, Remus turned apprehensively to Lily. “I haven't been in yet.”

“Just push open the doors, Remus. It’s only a house.” Lily pushed him towards the doors.

Remus turned the handle, feeling a tingle of magic as the house registered his identity. As he pushed the door open he gaped. Inside was a huge foyer leading off to a double staircase. Looking up Remus saw that there were at least three floors. Suddenly Pasha appeared. “Master Remus has come to Master Harry’s home?”

“Hi Pasha.” At the sight of the little house-elf, Remus didn’t know why, but he suddenly felt uncomfortable. “I have but you are not to tell anyone, not even Master Harry.”

Pasha bowed low. “Pasha understands.”

After dismissing Pasha, Remus looked up the stairs. “Let’s go investigate.”

Lily slowly followed Remus upstairs as she’d been there before. The first room they came to was the nursery and obviously not somewhere Lily wanted to be reminded of. She bypassed the room and pushed open the next set of doors. She was taken aback to find a fire burning in the grate. Remus followed her into the room. Yet another house-elf appeared. “I is Nero, Master Remus.”

“Hi Nero.” Remus looked round. “Why is the fire burning?”

“You’s home, Master Remus.” Nero bowed. “I is making it warm for you.”

“Thanks but that will be all.” Remus hoped that he’d get no more interruptions. He walked over to a door inset into the wall and pulled it open. “Bloody hell, Lily. You should see this bathroom.”

Lily walked over and gasped. The entire bathroom was covered in Travertine tile and the bath itself was sunken into the floor with steps leading down both sides. The biggest shower Lily had ever seen was set into the far wall. She guessed that the toilet must be behind the

door on the far side of the room. "It didn't look like this when I was here last time."

Remus scowled. "Harry!"

Lily sighed. "Remus, he's sixteen now. While I wasn't exactly happy about him spending time alone with Hermione when he was underage, I think you should cut him a break."

"I just don't want him doing anything he'll regret." Remus argued.

"I'm sure Hermione is using a contraceptive spell, if they've gone as far as you're worried they might have. I know I had enough sense to when it was us in that position, and we were only fifteen." Lily reminded him gently that they'd indulged at far younger an age than Harry was now.

"I'll back off." Remus kissed her on the forehead. "It's an amazing bathroom isn't it?"

Lily looked longingly at the tub. "I like the way you could swim in this."

Remus caught the look. "Do you want to try it?"

"Remus!" Lily tried to sound scandalized and failed. "I'd need a bathing costume."

Remus called out. "Nero."

The small elf appeared. "Yes, Master Remus?"

"I'd like a bathing costume for Lily and something for me." Remus ordered.

Lily shook her head. "I could have just transfigured my clothes."

Nero saved Remus from answering by returning with the requested outfits. Remus took them and passed Lily the one piece bathing suit Nero had brought for her. Lily held it out and burst out laughing. "Do they think we still live in the Victorian era?" The costume would have

swamped her, with buttons up to her neck and a long skirt attachment to cover her legs.

Remus held up his own costume. "I think so. I don't think I'm supposed to show any of myself either."

Lily laughed all the more. "Well if Harry and Hermione were using these, I don't think they were going to get very far."

Remus laughed as well. "With the house-elves as chaperones, perhaps I should stop worrying."

Lily pulled out her wand and transfigured the outfit into a two piece costume. "Well, get out then. I'm not getting changed with you in here."

Remus went out before transfiguring his own outfit into a pair of swimming shorts. He then slipped into them before knocking on the door. "Are you decent?"

"Come in." Lily called out.

Remus wasn't surprised to find that the pool was already full, and Lily was in it, treading water. "It didn't take you long."

"It's not every day I get to swim in a bathtub this large." Lily grinned. "I'm making the most of it while it lasts."

Remus slipped into the water and swam up next to her. "This can be yours anytime you want it. Harry's already said I can use this house. I think he's planning to stay at Grimmauld Place when he leaves school."

Lily teased him. "So you're willing to invite me over more often then?"

Remus shook his head and pulled Lily over to where the water was shallower and he could stand up. "No, I'm saying that it could be yours for always."

Lily felt her mouth go dry. "What do you mean?"

“Lily, when all this mess is over, will you marry me?” Remus hadn’t intended to propose in the middle of a bath tub, but it just felt right.

“Oh Remus.” Lily felt her throat close up as she held back her tears.

Remus slid his arm around her waist. “Is that a yes then?”

Lily nodded and Remus pulled her closer. “I love you.”

“I love you too.” Lily closed her eyes as Remus angled his head to kiss her.

Lily felt her heart begin to beat faster as Remus nibbled gently on her bottom lip before leaving her mouth to travel down to her neck. Letting her head fall back, Lily moaned as Remus suckled gently on the nape of her neck before reaching up to clasp the bow that held her bikini top up. “May I?”

Lily nodded and shivered as Remus pulled open the bow at her neck and the one at back, before throwing the top aside. “Kiss me.” Lily begged.

Remus crushed her against his chest before roughly kissing her, passion beginning to overpower any gentleness that had existed previously. Lily responded eagerly, running her hands up and down Remus’ back before sliding them down and inside the back of Remus’ shorts. Remus broke away from the kiss to exhale at the feel of Lily’s hands on his bottom. “Merlin, Lily.”

“Do you want me to stop?” Lily started to suck gently on Remus’s earlobe.

“Yes. No. Yes.” Remus tried to control his breathing as Lily continued to tease him. “I think we should get out of this bathtub. It was a bad idea.”

Lily reluctantly removed her hands. “Let’s get dried off then.”

Remus watched, his mouth open slightly, as Lily surfaced from the pool, water streaming down her half-naked body. "Lily, I think you should put a towel around you."

Lily stuck out her tongue in a playful fashion at Remus, before wiggling her bikini clad bottom at him. "And I don't."

Remus grabbed his wand that was lying at the side of the tub. "Accio Lily."

Lily squealed as she shot backwards towards Remus who grabbed her. "Rem!"

"You should know better than to tempt me like that." Remus walked backwards until Lily was hemmed in against the side of the bathtub, unable to reach the ground.

"Rem, I can't touch the bottom." Lily was having trouble treading water so close to the edge.

Remus gave her a wicked smile. "I can. Wrap your legs around me."

Lily felt her legs grow weak at Remus' invitation. "I thought we weren't supposed to be doing this."

Remus looked all innocent. "Whatever do you mean? I'm simply saving you from drowning."

Lily wrapped her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck before pressing her body against him. "So save me then."

Remus cupped Lily's bottom with his hand forcing her against him before claiming her mouth. Lily gladly opened up to him, letting her tongue play with his, before gently biting it, making Remus groan, and increase the pressure of the kiss. Playfulness turned to fervor as Remus moved both hands to reach for the ties holding Lily's bikini bottom up. Not bothering to ask permission this time, Remus pulled the bows open and ripped the bottom away.

Time seemed to stand still as the two kissed again and again; Lily knew that they should stop, but it felt too good. Breaking off the kiss, Lily pushed Remus away slightly so that she could grasp his shorts in her hands. Remus grabbed both of her wrists. "I'll do it."

Lily watched as Remus shucked off the shorts before returning to kiss her. Lily wrapped her arms and legs securely around Remus again, trying to get closer as she felt his growing need for her. Lily moaned softly as Remus gave her one last kiss on her lips before beginning to kiss her neck and tilting her backwards in the water. Remus then cupped Lily's breast with his hand, before bringing his mouth to join it, feeling her nipple harden under his ministrations. Almost unable to bear the sensations, Lily pushed his head away. "Rem, wait."

Remus kept his arms around her. "Do you want me to stop, Lily?"

Lily answered by grabbing Remus by the hair, pulling herself up to kiss him. As Lily rubbed herself against him, Remus felt as if he was going to explode with need but still wanting to be certain that she knew what she was doing, he broke off the kiss. "Lily, are you really sure?"

Lily opened her eyes and simply nodded.

At Lily's response, Remus covered her lips with his once more and, in one swift motion pulled Lily down onto him, groaning as he slid into her welcoming heat. Barely giving her body time to adjust, Remus began to move, slowly at first and then quicker as he felt his body tighten.

Lily locked her legs more tightly around him as she tried to pull him further into her. She had never wanted anyone quite as much as she wanted him now. As heat built inside her, Lily moaned out Remus' name and buried her teeth into his neck, her nails scoring his back. Aroused almost to fever pitch by Lily's actions, Remus gave in totally to his primordial instincts.

Lifting her head as she felt the change in Remus' demeanor, Lily opened her eyes to meet a gaze that no longer looked distinctly human. Not caring, Lily met him thrust for thrust, kiss for kiss, striving

for the moment of completion. Suddenly Remus felt Lily's body stiffen and she moaned his name before beginning to shake. Driven on by the feeling of Lily tightening around him, Remus felt his own release building, until the intensity reached a crescendo and he went over the edge; crying out before dropping his head to sink his teeth into the soft tissue of Lily's breast.

Even though she'd been through it before, and knew that she'd be unable to dislodge him, Lily yelped at the pain as Remus' teeth broke through her skin, and tried to push him away. Wrapping his arms around her, Remus held Lily firmly in place until his shudders subsided; before gently lapping at the blood that was trickling from the wound he'd inflicted. Lily whimpered softly as residual sensations threatened to overwhelm her. Remus then dropped his head into the crook of Lily's neck, breathing heavily.

Lily wrapped her arms around him and stroked his hair. "I love you."

Remus leant into the embrace. "I love you as well. I've always loved you."

At Dae's house, Anna hissed as pain shot through her neck. "Ouch."

Dae watched Anna grab her neck. "What's wrong?"

"I don't know." Anna walked over to the mirror and pulled down her top to look at her neck. "Oh Merlin."

"What is it?" Dae walked up to her and put his arms around her waist.

"Remus has marked someone else." Anna rubbed her neck where the mark had resided.

Dae guessed she was experiencing a sense of loss. "I'm sorry."

Anna shook her head. "You don't understand; I'm not bothered that he's done it. I bothered because I think its Lily."

"You've got to be kidding me." Dae knew that Remus was still in love with Lily but he didn't think he was so stupid as to take it that far.

"I'm not." Anna gave a small smile. "I hope they know what they're doing."

"If Sirius finds out, he'll kill him." Dae dropped a kiss on Anna's neck, making her shiver. "I'll apparate round tonight and see what he's got to say for himself."

"I'll do the same with Lily." Anna turned to Dae. "But in the meantime, I've got a really good idea of what we can do."

Dae laughed and grabbed her hand before dragging her off. "I know just the place."

Sitting in his room, French muttered about wizards and their strange behavior, even as he finished putting together a small blanket for Pasha.

Next Chapter: Voldemort makes his first move. I'm not sure when this will be up. I've drafted it but it still needs work. If it isn't before Christmas, then I wish everyone a Happy Holiday!

Chapter 63: Takeover

5th February 1997

Voldemort marched up the long underground tunnel, his men following behind. He eventually reached a wall where the back of a statue blocked his way. He tapped it. "Dissendium."

The statue inside the school slid sideways allowing him and his men access. Voldemort took the map from Sirius. "Amicus, I'd like you to deal with Snape. The rest of you know your assignments."

One by one the Death Eaters poured into the school from behind the statute of the hump backed witch.

Voldemort headed for the Defense Against the Dark Arts classroom where he knew his daughter was being taught. He'd deliberately chosen this particular time to invade. Finding the classroom, he pushed open the door. He wished he'd had a camera as the look on Percy's face was quite funny. "Good afternoon, Prewett, children."

Most of the children screamed when they realized who'd just walked in. Seville felt queasy. Voldemort casually sat down at the one of the spare chairs at the back of the classroom, and put his feet onto the table. "Now, Prewett. I'd like these children to give me a demonstration of defense."

Seeing the casual way Voldemort was acting, Percy immediately decided that this was a joke being played by one of the older students. "I suggest you get out my classroom before I report you to the Headmistress."

Seville stood up. "Professor Prewett?"

"Yes Miss Longbottom?" Percy ignored the man at the back of the classroom.

"I don't think it's a good idea to talk to Lord Voldemort like that." Seville knew it was her father; not only had she visited him enough times to recognize it was him from his demeanor, but he was also

wearing the same cloak he'd been wearing when she'd first met him at Sirius Black's house.

"If I actually believed that it was You-Know-Who, then I might be concerned." Percy snapped. "Now sit down and return to reading Chapter 14." Percy then looked back at Voldemort. "You can stay there until the polyjuice wears off."

Voldemort shook his head and stood up. "I'm afraid I don't have time for that."

Percy took out his wand and locked the door. "Now sit down."

Seville got up and went to walk towards Voldemort. Georgie grabbed her arm. "You'll get into trouble."

"No, I won't." Seville pulled free.

Georgie got up. "Please Sev, sit down."

Percy marched over to Seville and grabbed her arm. Voldemort narrowed his eyes and advanced towards Percy. "I suggest you unhand my daughter right now before I do something you'll regret."

Percy totally ignored the comment about Seville being Voldemort's daughter, even though most of the class did not. "Now see here..."

Voldemort had had enough, and raised his wand. "Morsmordre."

The class erupted into panic as the Dark Mark floated over Percy's head. Seville turned to Percy with a regretful look on her face. "I tried to warn you."

Percy held out his shaking wand as he backed up. "You're not him."

"I'm afraid I am." Voldemort turned to the children. "I'm not going to hurt any of you. Make your way to the Great Hall."

Most of the children didn't need telling twice and ran. Seville didn't move. Georgie stepped in front of her friend. "Seville, is it true?"

Seville looked up at Voldemort, who placed a hand on her shoulder. "It's true."

Georgie went white. "Oh shit."

"Georgie, it's going to be alright." Seville tried to reassure her friend.

Voldemort turned his attention to Georgie. "Georgie is short for Georgiana is it not?"

Georgie nervously nodded but didn't say anything, as her mouth had suddenly dried up.

Voldemort smiled. "So your father would be Deputy Headmaster Lupin then?"

Georgie found her voice again as she defended Remus. "Leave my Dad alone."

Voldemort laughed. "A Gryffindor if ever I saw one. Now put the wand down."

Georgie froze, unsure whether to do as he said.

Seville put her hand on the wand. "Georgie, I promise you'll be okay."

Georgie lowered her wand just as the door flew open to reveal Remus framed in the doorway. "Georgie, Seville are you both alright?"

Georgie ran over to him, and threw her arms around his waist. "Dad."

Voldemort turned his back on Percy and faced Remus. "Professor Lupin, I presume?"

"Yes." Remus had to stop himself from automatically adding 'my Lord' onto the end of the word.

“Your daughter was ready to take me on in defense of you.” Voldemort knew that Remus would be proud of his daughter. “Which is more than I can say for your useless defense teacher. I want him sacked.”

Remus walked round Voldemort to find Percy cowering at the back of the classroom, his wand drawn but shaking so erratically that he wouldn't have stood much chance of doing anything. “Percy, I suggest you pack your things and go. I'm no longer in a position to do anything for you.”

Voldemort held up his hand. “Before he leaves he needs to swear an oath not to reveal my presence here. If he refuses, I will kill him.”

Percy couldn't give the oath fast enough. Voldemort walked out of the classroom and called out to the two men who had tried to keep up with Remus as he had ran to check on his daughter and Seville. “Escort this excuse for a teacher off the premises. He can collect his things another time. If he gives you any trouble, kill him. Actually, if he does anything you don't like, you can kill him.”

“Yes my Lord.” The two men each grabbed an arm and dragged a screaming Percy away with them.

Voldemort turned to Remus and the two girls. “Professor Lupin, I suggest that you and your daughter make your way down to the Great Hall.”

Remus put an arm around Georgie and started to lead her away. “We'd better do as he says, Georgie.”

Georgie stopped, and turned back to Seville. “Do you want to come with us?”

Seville felt tears fill her eyes at the realization that Georgie was still willing to be her friend. She turned to Voldemort. “May I go, my Lord?”

“You may.” Voldemort was pleased with Seville's actions as well as Georgie's.

Remus held out his empty hand to the girl and led both her and Georgie away. He was glad that Georgie hadn't rejected Seville but his feelings were bittersweet as it still smarted that she hadn't been able to deal with the truth about him. Remus would have liked to have gone to find Auri as well, but he had been more concerned about Georgie because after he'd obliterated her, unlike her sister, she no longer had any idea of what he really was, and the danger she could be in.

When he walked into the Hall, he was pushed together with Seville and Georgie into a corner. He felt sick as he saw Severus together with his three children standing in the middle of the room. Harry stood with his arm around Auri, and clenched his fists as he watched Sirius separate Hermione. "Still alive I see."

Hermione scowled. "No thanks to you."

Sirius backhanded her, knocking her to the floor. Dudley put his hand on Harry's shoulder to stop him bolting, and whispered urgently to him. "You once said that this was bigger than all of us. It still is. You can't do anything."

Severus also went to go to Hermione's defense. Sirius span round. "Stay where you are. Move a step closer and she dies."

Severus froze. Bas and Livvy both clung to him, crying. "Let her go. It's me you want."

"You're not in any position to bargain with me, Snape." Sirius snapped. "One more word from you and she dies."

Harry watched as Hermione carefully moved her hand towards her pocket. Engrossed with Severus, Sirius hadn't noticed. Suddenly Hermione flung a capsule towards her father. "Safe Journey."

Sirius watched as Severus and his two children disappeared. He then rounded on Hermione. "Any last wishes?"

Hermione knew that the time had come to use the knowledge that Severus had imparted to her. "I wish that I wasn't your daughter, but I am."

Sirius halted. "I beg your pardon?"

"I'm your daughter, Amicus." Hermione had wanted to call him Sirius but she didn't want to expose Lily and her children unless it was absolutely necessary.

Sirius grabbed her by the arm and pulled her into the antechamber off the Great Hall, before indicating that she should sit down. "I'll ignore the question of how you know who I am at the moment, or the obviously untrue comment about you being my daughter. My main concern is how you got Snivellus past the wards."

Hermione simply folded her arms and refused to say anything. Voldemort chose that moment to walk into the room. "Astus informs me that you let go Snape go."

"Not intentionally." Sirius scowled at Hermione. "I'd set up wards all around the Great Hall. Somehow she had a portkey that managed to break through them."

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. "Perhaps Lady Black can answer a few questions."

Sirius could have kicked himself for not thinking of Lily. "I'll get her."

Remus had to hold himself back as he watched Sirius come back into the hall, before grabbing Lily by the arm and dragging her into the anteroom. Seville looked up at him and whispered. "Will he hurt Aunt Lily?"

"I don't know, Seville." Remus half wished he'd been behind his mask at that moment; at least he would have known what was going on. Orion, who was standing with Anna, the two of them united for a change, looked determined, and was about to make a break for it, when Remus, who had spotted the look, knelt down. "Orion, please

don't do anything stupid. Your Mum would kill me if I let anything happen to you."

Anna put her arm through Orion's, suddenly looking frightened. "Don't leave me, Ori."

Orion had never seen Anna so unsure of herself, and it was fear for his sister, rather than Remus' words that influenced his decision. Knowing that Lily would want him to take care of his sister, he removed Anna's arm from his own, before sliding his arm around her shoulders instead. Anna sagged in relief against her brother. Remus stood back up.

In the antechamber, Sirius pushed Lily onto her knees in front of Voldemort who stared down at Lily. "Lady Black. An interesting portkey your student had. We believe it's one of your creations."

Lily shook her head. "I'd like to take credit for it but I knew nothing about it."

Voldemort didn't believe her and withdrew his wand. "You expect me to believe a sixth year student was capable of producing a portkey like that."

Frightened for Lily, Hermione defended her. "It's what I've starting working on for my end of year project. I have all the notes in my room. Professor Black had nothing to do with it."

"Very well." Voldemort sat down. "I wish to see the notes. Lady Black's life will depend on it. You'll escort Amicus to your room and return with them."

Ten minutes later Hermione returned and passed over her notebook to Voldemort who thumbed through it. "Impressive." He passed the book to Lily who quickly scanned the notes. "Quite the little genius isn't she?"

Lily smiled gently at Hermione. "This is excellent work Hermione. I'd have never thought of adapting the harmonics of someone's magical signature to bypass the wards."

"I now have another question." Voldemort turned to Hermione. "Exactly how do you know who Amicus is?"

Hermione stuck to the story she'd discussed with Dae. "Felidae Venant told me."

"How does he know?" Sirius barked out.

"I have no idea." Hermione sounded dejected. "I only know because he recognized my mother."

"And she is?" Voldemort asked silkily.

"Virginie LeStrange." Hermione felt delighted to see the shock on Voldemort's face.

Voldemort turned to Sirius. "So it would appear that Snape's daughter might be your daughter after all."

"I doubt it." Sirius was dubious of Hermione's story. "But there's a way to prove it right here and now."

"Be my guest." Voldemort wondered how Sirius was going to do it.

Hermione swallowed hard as she waited for the blow. Sirius didn't disappoint her, backhanding so hard that she fell off the chair. The only upside was that she had the pleasure of seeing Sirius double up in pain as well.

Voldemort looked confused. "Would someone like to tell me what's going on?"

Sweating, Sirius climbed unsteadily to his feet. "I've sworn never to knowingly harm a child of mine. It would appear that Snape's brat is exactly that."

Voldemort looked assessingly at Hermione. "I hope your potions mastery is as good as your charms work. As you let your father go, you'll be taking his place."

"It's better." Hermione flung back at him.

"It had better be. For the time being you've just bought yourself your life." Voldemort turned to Sirius before walking out. "Your daughter is now your responsibility. And you'd better find a way to get past the pain problem as you're going to be marking her. Also, as you've already sworn that your wife would not have to take my Mark, she'll also be taking yours. Once you've done it, join me outside."

Lily climbed to her feet and watched as Sirius scowled at Hermione. "I want you to release me from my oath."

"No." Hermione refused.

"I'm going to count to ten, and if you haven't released me from it by then, I will go outside, pick a child to bring back in and torture them in front of you." Sirius pulled out his wand and started counting.

Hermione knew he wasn't bluffing. "I release you from your oath not to knowingly harm me so that you may mark me."

Sirius narrowed his eyes at the condition included in the release but accepted it. "Now kneel and swear to obey me in all things, never to reveal my true identity, never to take up arms against me and to defend me to the death if necessary."

Hermione noticed that Sirius pretty much covered all eventualities but having little choice, took a deep breath and knelt down before offering up her arm and swearing the allegiance.

Sirius took off his mask. He wanted her to see his face as he marked her. "You brought this upon yourself in choosing to help Snivellus escape. Morsmordre." Sirius pushed as much pain as he could through the mark; he knew from the pain he'd undergone when he'd hit her, that Hermione was indeed his daughter but he had few feelings for her other than contempt and dislike.

Hermione was soon screaming on the floor as the Mark burned its way into her soul. As Sirius finished, she vomited. Sirius immediately vanished the offending substance as he couldn't bear the sight of it.

Lily helped Hermione to her feet and sat her down. "I'd offer to do something about your lip but I haven't got my wand."

Hermione smiled wanly. "It's okay."

Sirius pulled Lily away to face him. "I need you to kneel, Lily."

Lily didn't. "So much for your promises."

Sirius took her face in his hands. "I'm sorry but I've got to. Please don't force me to threaten you, Lily."

Like Hermione, Lily wasn't willing to sacrifice a student for her refusal. Reluctantly she rolled up her sleeve. Sirius shook his head. "Bend your head."

Lily declined. "I'm not having that thing at the back of my head."

"Choose where then." Sirius was willing to do that much for his wife.

Lily thought quickly; she needed the mark where she could see it. "The inside of my left ankle."

Sirius stood patiently as Lily unlaced her boot and removed her stocking before holding out her leg.

Sirius gently cradled Lily's foot in his hand. "I'm sorry, Lily."

"Just do it." Lily turned her head away.

Sirius pushed enough power to make the Mark but little more than that. Even so, it was still enough to make Lily scream. "It's done."

Lily winced as she replaced her stocking and boot. "What now?"

"You both may go." Sirius replaced his mask and headed out of the room.

Lily turned to Hermione. "Severus is going to kill you for putting yourself in danger."

"He had Livvy and Bas holding on to him. I wasn't going to get a better chance of getting them out than that." Hermione knew that Severus would understand.

Lily escorted Hermione down to Severus' old rooms. "I'll make sure that everything is alright before I leave you."

Both of them checked the rooms together, and, after finding nothing untoward, Hermione grabbed a couple of pain potions, passing one of them to Lily. "Bottoms up."

Lily smiled as Hermione attempted a little humor. "Not quite my favorite tippie but right now I think it is." After knocking back the potion, Lily swiftly erected a privacy bubble. "Thanks for not giving me away."

"I'm just glad that I took notes of everything that you'd done over Christmas." Hermione had stayed with Harry for a few days, and as Hermione had been interested, Lily had discussed her latest project for Voldemort with her, allowing Hermione to take notes. "To be honest, though, I wasn't sure I'd got it right until I saw Papa vanish."

"You did well." Lily comforted Hermione. "I have a feeling that Severus would no longer have been with us, if you hadn't done it."

"I know." Hermione shuddered at the close call her father had had. "I don't even know where Papa is now. When I try and think about it, my mind starts to wander. I know I knew where when I constructed the portkey but now it's a little like a blur."

"That's the beauty of the Fidelius Charm." Lily informed her. "You do realize that as only your father and whoever the secret-keeper is, knows where he's gone, that you won't be able to contact him?"

Hermione nodded. "I do, and I don't care. I'm just glad he's safe."

"I actually expect he's pulling his hair out right now." Lily stood up. "Would you like to stay with me tonight?"

Hermione shook her head. "Black might decide to drop in on you, and I don't really wish to see him again." Hermione suddenly realized something. "Where's Cassie?"

"It was her weekend to be staying with Sirius. At least I know now why he asked for her to come early." Even though Lily had baulked at Cassie spending so much time with Sirius, she was now glad that her young daughter had been absent from the school.

"You'd better go, Lily." Hermione got up and hugged the woman she considered a friend. "I'll be alright."

"If you need me, I don't care if Sirius is there, please let me know." Lily kissed Hermione on the cheek. "I'll do whatever I can for you in lieu of Severus."

Hermione clamped down on the tears that threatened at Lily's words. "Goodnight, Lily."

"Goodnight, Hermione." Lily opened the doors and disappeared.

Hermione warded the door before heading into her bedroom.

Snape Manor

Severus found himself with his two children in the carriage house. "Fuck."

Livvy cried even harder and Severus picked up her. "I'm not mad at you, Livvy."

Livvy wrapped her arms around her Dad's neck and buried her face in it. "I want Hermione."

“So do I.” Severus put an arm around Bas’ shoulders. “I don’t have time to mess with the carriage, so I’m going to break through the wards. This might get a little bumpy, so hold on.”

Bas held on tightly to his father and sister as Severus apparated them up to the main house, gasping as he heard a loud boom as the wards rippled and gave. Bas knew that only Severus and Hermione could distort them like this.

Hearing the boom of the wards, Virginie ran at full speed from the playroom where Dominic was eating his tea. Spotting Severus at the bottom of the stairs with two of their children wrapped around him, she ran down the stairs. “Severus, where’s Hermione?”

Severus knew his words wouldn’t be of any comfort to his wife. “She sacrificed herself to get me and the children out.”

Virginie swayed a little on her feet. “She’s dead?”

Severus didn’t know. “I’m not sure. Black had just threatened me when Hermione threw a portkey at me. I just hope she used the information we gave her to save herself.”

Virginie felt no relief. “I hope so.”

Bas looked confused. “Black?”

“Yes, Bas.” Severus knelt down, Livvy still clinging precariously to him. “The Death Eater called Amicus that you saw is really Sirius Black.”

“So Professor Black’s a Death Eater as well?” Bas put two and two together and came up with five.

“No, Lily isn’t.” Virginie rushed to reassure her son about one of his favorite teachers. “She’s been forced to protect her husband.”

“Does she love him?” Bas liked to think that all marriages were as blissful as his parents.

“No.” Severus knew that Lily was in love with Remus. She’d admitted to him what they’d done, when she’d gone to him for help to create a balm to cover the bite without magic. “She has to stay because of her children.”

Bas was glad to hear that Lily wasn’t what he’d thought. “Good.” He looked a little tremulously at his father. “Do you think Harry is alright?”

Severus knew that this was something that he could reassure his son about. “Harry’s a clever boy; he’ll be just fine.”

Bas suddenly felt tired. “I’m tired, Mama.”

Virginie put an arm around her son. “Don’t you want anything to eat?”

Bas shook his head. “No.”

Virginie led him upstairs. “Let’s get you and Livvy into bed. I know it’s early but I think a dreamless sleep potion and an early night are called for.”

After tucking both children up together as they neither of them wanted to be alone, Virginie rescued Dominic off Bright, before also tucking him up in bed. Only then did she turn to Severus. “What now?”

“I can’t go back.” Severus was frustrated. “I don’t know if Hermione’s alive. All I can do is wait to hear from Remus.” Severus opened the door to their bedroom and led Virginie in.

Virginie finally gave into the emotions that had threatened to overtake her when Severus had first arrived back, and she burst into tears. “Oh Sev.”

Severus held onto his wife as she wept; both frightened for their daughter. As Virginie’s sobs began to lessen, Severus slipped his arm under her legs and carried her over to the bed, dropping down onto it so that she lay on top of him. Virginie looked up at him. “If he hurts my baby, I’m going to find him and I’m going to make him sorry he was ever born.”

"I know, angel, as will I." Severus cupped her face. "I swear on my magic and my life that if I discover he's laid a finger on my daughter, I will hunt him down and make him pay for what he's done."

Virginie shivered a little as the magic from Severus' oath rippled over her. "Hold me, Sev."

Severus already was holding her, so instead, he bent his head and kissed her softly, surprised when Virginie parted her lips for him, seeking more than just comfort. Deepening the kiss, Severus was astounded by the aggression Virginie was showing.

Virginie broke off the kiss and sat up, and began to open her blouse. "Make love to me, Sev."

Severus realized that Virginie wanted to lose herself; to try and escape from the horrors of the day. Feeling the same way, Severus slipped both hands into Virginie's hair and dragged her down to claim her lips. Then rolling her beneath him, Severus began to make love to his wife.

Hogwarts

Harry felt his legs threaten to give way as he saw only Voldemort and, after a short time, Sirius, return. He wondered what had happened to Lily and Hermione.

Voldemort waited for Sirius to join him before turning to everyone there. "You'll all be aware of my feelings towards Mudbloods."

Most of the Muggleborns in the Hall felt a shiver go down their spines; most didn't expect to live to see the end of the day.

Voldemort, however, surprised them with his announcement. "I wish to show the wizarding world that I am not the monster they believe me to be. As a gesture of goodwill, all Mudbloods and their families will be obliviated and they will leave the wizarding world never to return. Any attempt by those remaining here to contact them will result in the death of the perpetrator and the Mudblood and their families. Do I make myself clear?"

A low murmur went around the school, as Dudley swallowed hard and Luna tightened her grip on his hand.

Callide moved to the front of the hall. "When I call your name, step up." As each child who was called stepped up, they were obliterated before being removed by a Death Eater, who was going to escort them home and obliterate their families.

Dudley watched as one by one every Muggleborn was called forward except for him. He realized that his Dad must have had something to do with his being allowed to stay. Remus had; he'd also been instrumental in preventing the death of the Muggleborns, which had been Voldemort's original plan. Remus had suggested that Voldemort would gain more favor when he finally made his coup known to the rest of the wizarding world, if it had been shown that he'd acted mercifully. After thinking it over, Voldemort had agreed with him.

Voldemort leant back against the table. "The rest of you will be allowed to remain provided you swear allegiance to me. You will take my Mark before you leave this school in your final year. No communication of what has happened in this school will be allowed; not even when you return home. All those who don't wish to swear an allegiance will die along with your families, or you can join the Muggle world along with the Mudbloods." He then turned his attention to the teachers. "Of course I'll need you all to take my Mark before I leave and swear the same oath the children will be taking."

Remus knew that this was his cue to leave the Hall, and he squeezed Seville's shoulder before stepping forward. "And if I refuse?"

Voldemort nodded towards Sirius. "Take him out and show him what happens to those who refuse what I offer."

"Leave my Dad alone." Harry pushed forward, after shaking off Dudley's grip on his shoulder.

Voldemort swung round on Harry. "And someone else who should know better than to say anything. Take him to join his father."

Harry was roughly grabbed and dragged out after Remus. Once they'd been pushed into an empty adjacent classroom, Sirius turned to the four men with him. "I can deal with these two by myself. Now get out and return to the hall."

Smirking behind their masks at the treatment they expected Remus and his son to receive, the four men returned to join Voldemort. Sirius then handed over Remus' and Harry's masks before passing Harry his wand; Remus had never given his up. "Transfigure your clothes."

Sirius went to leave but Harry put a hand on his arm. "Is Maman alright?"

"She's fine, Harry." Sirius reassured the worried boy. "The Dark Lord thought she might have been involved in Snivellus' escape but it turns out that his brat had done it alone."

Harry wanted to ask about Hermione but didn't dare. Remus saved him the bother. "What was that crap that Hermione was spouting off about you being her father?"

"It's nothing." Sirius wasn't willing to share; it was bad enough that Lily knew. "She did it to save her own life."

"And did it work?" Remus pulled up his hood, and slipped on his mask.

"Unfortunately yes. Our Master has ordered her to replace Snivellus." Sirius would rather Hermione had been executed but could not go against Voldemort. "But at least I had the pleasure of marking her."

Remus frowned, wondering whether Severus had made a mistake in brewing the potion if Sirius had survived inflicting the Dark Mark on Hermione; he decided to ask Hermione later. "Did the Dark Lord mark Lily?"

"No, as I'd already promised her she wouldn't have to take his Mark, he asked me to do it instead." Sirius nodded towards Harry. "Let's get back in there. I don't want to leave our Master without protection for too long."

Harry put his mask on and followed his Dad and Sirius back out to the Hall.

As Remus and Harry were changing, in the Great Hall the children were all one by one swearing allegiance to Voldemort. All had agreed to do so until they reached Cedric Diggory. "I'm not swearing to anything."

"Diggory, isn't it?" Voldemort got up from the Headmistress' chair. "I do believe your parents are purebloods aren't they?"

Cedric nodded. "Yes."

"And you'd let them die or fade away into the Muggle world for something as simple as swearing allegiance to me." Voldemort by now had reached the pale faced youth.

"They'd rather do that for me than have me serve you." Cedric knew full well how his parents felt about the monster standing in front of him.

"Very well." Voldemort pulled out his wand. "Choose."

Cedric couldn't bear the thought of losing his identity. "I'd rather die than live a lie as would my parents."

Voldemort thought it a shame such bravery was wasted on the boy. "Avada Kedavra."

Cho screamed as Cedric collapsed to the floor. Voldemort ignored her. "If there are any others of you who feel the same way as Diggory, then please make it known now."

While some of the older children would have been willing to give up their lives, most of them had younger siblings and weren't prepared to answer for them.

Remus' hearing had picked up the final half of the conversation on his way back, and he knew what he'd find when he entered the Great

Hall. He just hoped that Harry would act accordingly. Harry did, and both he and Remus walked calmly past Cedric's body, with Harry trying not to look down at the boy. Harry and Remus both knelt before Voldemort. Remus apologized. "I ask for forgiveness for our tardiness; we were delayed in Hogsmeade."

"Take your places." Voldemort ordered. He then sat back down as all the children finished swearing the allegiance except for Jamie and Seville.

Voldemort motioned to Jamie to come forward. Jamie did so and Voldemort turned him to face the other children. "I want you all to remember this day as the day when the Boy Who Lived swore allegiance to me."

As Jamie had already done so before, he had no problem with doing it again and knelt when ordered. "I swear to serve you to the best of my ability; to give up my life for you, never to bear arms against you and to die if you ask me to."

Ron, who'd sworn the same allegiance as Jamie, couldn't believe that Jamie had given in so easily. Ginny, however, wasn't the slightest bit surprised.

Voldemort held out his hand. "Seville, please come here."

Seville knew that the news about who her real father was had already circulated amongst her classmates. Voldemort then turned to face the children. "Some of you may have heard that Seville here is my daughter."

Seville wanted to cry at the look of disgust on some of the other pupils' faces but managed to hold back her tears as Voldemort slipped his arm around her shoulders. Georgie flashed her an encouraging smile.

Voldemort could feel Seville's tremors as he held her. "My daughter is to be treated with the utmost respect. Should I hear otherwise, the perpetrator and their entire family will pay the price." Voldemort could see the frightened looks that replaced the disgusted ones on some of

the children's faces. "You should be aware that your every motion will be being watched."

Voldemort wanted to spare his daughter from the possible repercussions of his actions; he hadn't intended to tell Percy about her but he'd felt surprisingly protective of his daughter when Percy had grabbed her, and it had just spilled out.

"All the children may now leave." Voldemort waited until they'd gone before turning to the teachers. "As I said earlier, you will be taking my mark and swearing allegiance to me."

"Headmistress, first of all, you're going to drop the wards on the school for me." Voldemort ordered. "I really have no wish to traipse up a dark tunnel any time I wish to get in."

"You can go to hell." Minerva stood her ground. "There's no way I'm releasing the wards. I'd rather die first." Having been alerted by Remus of Death Eaters in the school, Minerva had immediately transferred the school wards to him as a precaution, thinking that if Voldemort tried to get her to release them, he'd fail.

"I have little use for you then. Avada Kedavra." Voldemort casually gave Minerva her wish before calmly continuing to speak. "I think a little juggling might be necessary as I appear to be a few teachers short."

Voldemort turned to Hagrid, who was staring horrified at Minerva's body. "We don't need two teachers for Care of Magic Creatures, especially one is who a half-breed. Avada Kedavra."

Remus watched as the gentle man who'd never done anyone any harm fell lifeless to the floor.

Voldemort smiled nastily at Wilhemina Grubblyplank. "It looks as though you're going to be teaching all the children yourself. Now bare your arm and kneel before me."

Grubblyplank didn't really want to but like Jamie when he'd been placed in the same position, she didn't want to die either. Holding out

her arm she swore the oath and screamed loudly as Voldemort inflicted his mark on her. Unable to get up afterwards, two Death Eaters dragged her away.

Voldemort then turned his attention to Anna. "We've now got no need for a Muggle studies teacher as that is a subject that will no longer be required in this school."

Anna waited for him to use the killing curse on her. Voldemort tapped his chin with his wand. "Now what to do with you? Perhaps the Dark Arts."

It was only then that Anna realized that Prewett wasn't there. "I'm not qualified to teach Defense."

"I already know everything I need to know about your teaching skills." Voldemort informed her. "And I said nothing about teaching Defense."

Anna realized then that Defense against the Dark Arts was likely to be undergoing a radical change.

"You will teach history and take the first to third years for transfiguration. Lupin will take over teaching the Dark Arts as well as the Headmaster's position." Anna didn't panic as much as she would have done if she hadn't known that Lily was almost there with solving how to undo the Mark.

"And I refuse?" Anna was scared but didn't want to bow down to the monster who her mother had served as well as shared his bed.

Voldemort smirked. "Then unlike the easy option I gave to the former Headmistress and Lupin, I'll kill one student for every refusal I receive starting from now."

"You leave me little choice then." Anna couldn't stand by and let him kill a student because of her; she bared her left arm.

Voldemort pulled out his wand. "I suggest you grit your teeth; this is going to hurt."

A short time later each teacher was nursing a painful left arm. Voldemort hid his exhaustion. "You may all go. I expect the school to be operating as normal from tomorrow."

Anna went to leave only for Voldemort to stop her. "Deputy Headmistress, you will accompany me."

Anna felt her stomach go over but unable to do anything other than obey him, Anna followed. She was dismayed when they finally reached her rooms. Voldemort opened the door and stood aside to allow Anna to enter. Only once she was inside, did he follow her in.

Anna could feel her heart pounding. Voldemort knew what she was thinking. "I shouldn't worry; you're a little too Amazonian for my tastes, and it would hardly be tasteful to sleep with my dead lover's daughter, now would it?"

Anna was shocked. "You knew who I was?"

"Of course." Voldemort helped himself to a glass of wine. "I would have said something in the Great Hall but I thought I would spare us both the embarrassment of acknowledging your mother."

"Is it true that you killed her?" Anna got straight to the heart of the matter, and hoped that Voldemort would tell her the truth of what had happened.

"I did." Voldemort admitted. "I found her in bed with another Death Eater. Needless to say that he didn't last long. However, I'd already warned your mother what would happen if she slept with anyone other than me or your father."

Anna felt bile rise up in her throat. "You appall me."

Voldemort was unperturbed; the only reason he didn't punish her was because he was so fatigued. "You've already made that patently clear." He then took a mouthful of wine. "You might wonder why I've bothered to tell you all of this."

"Somewhat." Anna admitted.

"It's because of Seville. Even though she has several protectors in this school, I wish to extend her protection further via you. You will ensure that nothing happens to her, otherwise you'll enjoy a taste of what your mother went through." Voldemort watched Anna pale. "And I see you know exactly what that was."

Anna struggled hard not to vomit. "I do."

"Then we understand each other." Voldemort put down the glass. "Goodnight my dear."

Anna didn't answer as she rushed towards the bathroom; revulsion and fear overcoming her battle with her stomach. As she pushed open the door, she heard the door to her rooms close behind Voldemort.

In her rooms, Lily looked up as the door opened and Sirius entered. "Get out of my rooms."

"Lily, I'm sorry." Sirius closed the door behind him and knelt in front of Lily, holding her hand. "I didn't know that Lord Voldemort would make me do that to you."

Lily slapped his hand away. "It doesn't change what you've done."

"I tried to make it as painless as possible." Sirius put his hand back over Lily's.

"Unlike Hermione's." Lily narrowed her eyes. "You set out to make hers as painful as possible, didn't you?"

Sirius didn't deny it. "I did. I hate her and what she represents."

"You mean Severus, don't you?" Lily snarled. "It's not Hermione's fault. I thought you would have been a bit kinder to her, considering she's your daughter."

"I don't consider her my daughter, despite the fact that she is." Sirius loathed the girl.

“And exactly when were you going to let me know that?” Lily knew that she was going to put Sirius in an uncomfortable position.

“I didn’t know myself until tonight.” Sirius retorted. “It’s not as if her mother told me she was pregnant.”

“And exactly why would that be?” Lily pulled away from him to open the cupboard where she kept potions on hand.

Sirius didn’t want to tell Lily what he’d done. “Does it matter?”

“Yes, Sirius, it bloody well does.” Lily pulled out her second painkilling potion of the evening, and swiftly swallowed it. “Was she a one night stand?”

“You might say that.” Sirius hedged.

Lily put her hands on her hips. “And exactly what’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know what it means.” Sirius couldn’t bring himself to say it out loud.

Lily looked sickened. “You mean you forced yourself on a woman?”

“I was ordered to.” Sirius tried to defend himself. “I wasn’t alone.”

Lily was glad that she already knew; otherwise she’d have been hard put to control her temper. “How many of you?”

“Four.” Sirius admitted.

“Against one defenseless woman?” Lily shook her head. “You disgust me.”

Sirius went to take a step towards her. “Please Lily.”

“No, Sirius.” Lily pointed towards the door. “Get out.”

Sirius' face hardened. "No. I'm your husband and I'm not going anywhere."

"After what you've just told me I want a divorce." Lily waited for the threat.

"You're my wife and that's exactly what you're staying." Sirius advanced on her. "You're mine."

"I'm not a possession." Lily made sure her voice was full of venom. "Keep away from me."

Sirius grabbed her arm. "Lily, I know you're upset about Hermione but it was a long time ago, and I had little choice in the matter."

Lily pulled free. "So I'm just supposed to roll over and ignore the fact that you raped a woman."

"It's not something I'm proud of but I can't change it." Sirius wasn't going to beg Lily for forgiveness.

"I still want a divorce." Lily snapped.

Sirius decided to play hardball. "Very well then, but as the Muggleborn in our marriage, the children will remain with me, and you will return obliviated back to the Muggle world."

Lily knew she'd lost. "Fine. I'm still your wife in name but don't expect anything more than that from me."

Sirius wasn't going to put up with that either. "You will act exactly as a wife should act, and that includes sharing my bed." He then slid his hand into Lily's hair and roughly kissed her, forcing her lips apart with his tongue.

Lily bit his tongue, and Sirius let go out of her, and wiped away the blood that she had drawn. He then grabbed her arm. "If you ever do that again, I'll make you wish you'd never been born."

Frightened of him but knowing that if she backed down now, he'd have won, Lily hissed at him. "If you ever try to do that again, then I'm going to do the same again, because believe me, the only way I'm sleeping with you is if you force me to but I'm sure you'd get a kick out of it, wouldn't you?"

At Lily's words, Sirius lost his temper, and slapped Lily hard across the face, only to feel regret moments later when she started to cry. "Lily, I'm sorry."

"Leave me alone." Lily held a hand to her face. "Please, just leave me alone."

Sirius shook his head. "Let me heal it."

Lily turned away. "I don't want you anywhere near me."

Sirius wasn't backing off. "Lily, turn round so I can heal it."

When Lily didn't, Sirius grabbed her by the arms and held her still while he healed her face, before holding her against him. "Lily, I hate it when you make me angry. Please, you have to stop doing it. I don't want to separate you from the children but I will if I have to."

Lily slumped in his arms. Her children were her Achilles heel and Sirius knew it. "Very well, but please, I really want to be alone right now."

Sirius shook his head. "I'm going to stay here with you tonight, Lily."

Lily resigned herself to the fact that she was going to have sleep with Sirius, and let him lead her into the bedroom.

Sirius closed the bedroom door before starting to kiss his wife.

Elsewhere in the castle, Voldemort gave orders to the men he'd assigned to remain behind, before leaving via the fireplace in Remus' new office.

In Gryffindor, despite Voldemort's threat, things had started to get ugly. Seville backed up as Ron Prewett together with several seventh years advanced on her. "You're scum. You shouldn't even be allowed to dirty this House. You should be in Slytherin with the rest of the snakes." Ron grabbed Seville by the arm and started to drag her towards the door.

Georgie turned to her boyfriend. "Neville, aren't you going to stand up for Sev?"

"It's nothing to do with me." Neville refused to do anything to help.

Georgie slapped him across the face. "You're a disgrace to Gryffindor, not your sister." Georgie then intercepted Ron. "Back off Prewett."

"I should have known you'd help her, Lupin. You're just like your brother; a snake lover." Ron hissed at the girl.

"What's going on?" Jamie had heard the noise, and had come back downstairs.

"I think your girlfriend should be evicted, Potter." Ron pushed Seville onto the floor. "She belongs in the dirt with the rest of the snakes."

Jamie went to move towards Seville only for a few more of the seventh years to grab hold of him. "Let go of me."

Ron stood in front of him. "You're supposed to be the Boy Who Lived; more like the Coward Who Lived."

Jamie raised an eyebrow. "I didn't see you putting up a fight."

"You should have died like Diggory." Ron snapped at him before marching back to where Seville was still kneeling on the floor.

"Didn't you hear You-Know-Who, Prewett?" Georgie couldn't get to Seville. "If he hears about this, you and your family will pay for it."

"He's not here now, though is he?" Ron sneered.

"No, but I am." A voice interrupted them from the back of the room. Harry had been worried about Seville and Remus had agreed to give him the password to Gryffindor tower.

Ron smirked at the single Death Eater who was leaning casually against the door. "You and whose army?"

"I don't need anyone else, Prewett." Harry snarled. "So I suggest you act nice and leave Seville alone."

"Get lost." Ron felt confident with two of the seventh years standing behind him, and grabbed Seville by the hair.

Harry didn't hesitate. "Crucio."

Ron fell to the ground screaming. Harry didn't hold the curse long; just long enough to make his point. "Does anyone else want to mess with me?"

The seventh years let go of Jamie and backed off. Harry walked over to Seville and held out his hand. "Come with me. You as well, Miss Lupin." Harry wasn't leaving his sister alone.

Jamie walked over to Neville. "Don't ever speak to me again. If you do, you're dead." Jamie then stalked out after Harry and the two girls.

Harry led Seville to the Headmaster's office and gave the password to the gargoyles. Remus was waiting for them at the top of the stairs. "What happened?"

"Prewett and some of the seventh years attacked Seville." Harry wasn't happy. "Longbottom didn't even defend his sister. He doesn't deserve to be a member of this school, let alone a Gryffindor."

Remus put an arm around Seville, and turned to his daughter. "Are you alright, Georgie?"

"I slapped Neville, Dad." Georgie admitted. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not." Remus was proud that Georgie had defended her friend. "I'm glad that Seville has friends like you."

Georgie looked at the silver masked Death Eater. "I know it's your job to look after Seville but thank you."

Harry was surprised at Georgie's thanks. He made a snap decision and pulled off his mask. "That's quite alright, Georgie."

Georgie went white. "Harry?"

"Yes." Harry took a deep breath. "You've already been told this about me once before but you couldn't face up to the truth so Dad had to obliviate you."

Georgie felt ashamed. "In that case, I'm no better than Neville."

Remus knelt in front of his daughter. "You're better than Neville. He knew the truth about his mother and still didn't defend his sister; in fact he rejected her."

Georgie laid a hand on Remus' shoulder. "Dad, are you a Death Eater as well?"

Remus nodded. "I'm Praeses; the one you saw arriving late with Harry."

"Why?" Georgie didn't recoil or remove her hand.

"That's a long story." Remus smiled at his daughter. "Needless to say, not everything is as it seems."

"Tell me." Georgie demanded.

Remus motioned for everyone to sit down, and he told Georgie all about himself again. When he'd finished, he waited with baited breath.

Georgie could see that Remus almost looked afraid. Wanting to wipe away the look, she threw her arms around him. "I don't care what you've done. I still love you."

Remus felt like weeping as Georgie hugged him. Harry felt choked up as he watched his sister accept his Dad for what he truly was.

Remus stood up. "I'm going to let Georgie and Seville use my old quarters. Harry, you may return to Ravenclaw. Jamie, I think you'd better stay here with me for tonight until I can sort something out for you."

Jamie knew what he was going to do. "I'd like to request a transfer."

Remus wasn't surprised. "Very well."

Georgie and Seville both moved to stand by Jamie. "So would we."

Remus pulled the sorting hat off the shelf. "Jamie, you first."

The hat woke up as it touched Jamie's head. "So you'd like a transfer?"

"I would." Jamie responded quietly.

"Hmm." The hat thought about it. "You're definitely not Ravenclaw material nor are you meant for Hufflepuff. Of the houses left to put you in, this only leaves SLYTHERIN."

Jamie felt a little nervous but stood still as Remus transfigured his badge.

Georgie stepped up next. "My turn."

"Another one!" The hat wasn't used to transfers. "So you don't want Hufflepuff. Good job; you're far too cheeky."

Georgie giggled at the hat's comment.

"I think of the four, it had better be RAVENCLAW." The hat bellowed out.

Georgie beamed at Harry. "At least I'll get to be with you."

Seville looked scared as she stepped forward.

The hat went quiet. "Miss Longbottom, or perhaps I should call you Miss Riddle from now on. You'd be worshipped in Slytherin, so I think not. You want to stay with your friend, don't you?"

Seville nodded. "I do."

"Very well." The hat granted her wish. "I'll linger no more, for you it's going to be RAVENCLAW."

Remus transfigured both girls' badges. "For tonight, you can all sleep here with me. Tomorrow, I'll arrange for you to move into Ravenclaw and into private quarters there."

Seville didn't really want to be segregated. "Won't the other girls think it's favoritism?"

"I'll have the rooms changed into private quarters for the remainder of the girls in your year." Remus promised. "Now everyone into the bedroom. I'll get Pasha to provide us with hot chocolate."

Remus then closed the door to Headmaster's office, before following the children into his bedroom.

End of Chapter: This really will be the last chapter before Christmas Day. I wanted to end this chapter on a positive note as the next one is going to be particularly unpleasant. In light of that, even though I've written most of it, I'm not going to be uploading it until after the holidays. So Happy Holidays everyone!

Chapter 64: Life Goes On

The next chapter is the nasty one – I totally forgot about this one for some reason, even though I'd drafted it! This chapter sets the scene for the next one more than anything else.

23rd June 1997

Remus took the glass of scotch that Dae offered him. "So what is it that you want to tell me?"

Anna slipped her hand into Dae's. "We're going to have a baby."

Remus' face lit up. "Congratulations. When's it due?"

"January 1st." Anna beamed happily at Dae, before her smile slipped. "How do you think You-Know-Who will take it?"

"Not well." Remus admitted. "He's going to be really annoyed at having to find another teacher as well as the fact that Dae's the father; particularly as everyone still thinks Dae is engaged to Hermione."

"That's what we figured." Dae looked intently at his friend. "We therefore have a huge favor to ask of you."

Remus sighed as he contemplated the punishment he was going to receive in breaking the news. "Don't worry, I'll tell him; I wouldn't expect Anna to."

"It's not that." Dae actually felt nervous. "Will you say that you're the father?"

Remus was stunned. "What?"

At any other time, Anna would have laughed at the deer in the headlights look that Remus was sporting. "We'd like for you to say that you're the father. You-Know-Who will probably be less likely to punish me if you say that it's you. I'd have just left Hogwarts if I thought that You-Know-Who wouldn't take it out on the students, but

he's made it patently clear that Seville is partially my responsibility, and I can't just up and leave, knowing that others would suffer for something I'd done."

Remus fell silent for a few moments as he mulled over what his friends had requested of him. "If I agree, can I tell Lily and Harry the truth?"

"Absolutely." Anna squeezed Dae's hand as she realized that Remus was actually considering it.

"In that case, I'll do it." Remus knew that Dae would have done the same for him if their positions were reversed.

Anna burst into tears. "Sorry, I keep on doing this but I'm so relieved."

"Did you plan on the baby?" Remus watched Dae comfort his fiancée.

"No, it was an accident." Dae admitted. "Both of us thought that the other had taken care of the contraceptive charm; it wasn't until Anna returned to Hogwarts after the Easter holiday that she found out the truth. She only told me a few days ago."

"I would have taken a letter out if you'd asked me." Remus thought that Anna would have asked him to. Even though Anna had been unable to tell Dae about what had happened at Hogwarts at the start of the year, Remus hadn't been subject to the same embargo and had filled his friend in on Voldemort's actions.

"I wanted to tell Dae in person." Anna had been frightened enough when she'd broken the news in person to Dae; she hadn't wanted to do it by way of post.

Dae had been ecstatic, particularly as he found out that he was having a daughter. "And I'm glad she did. It was so much nicer to learn of it that way."

"I'd better go and break the news to the Dark Lord then." Remus stood up. "If you'll both excuse me."

Remus left and Anna turned to Dae. "Do you think he'll be punished?"

Dae shook his head. "On the contrary. I think the Dark Lord will be pleased."

31st August 1997

Harry stretched and pulled Hermione to him. "Do you think I'm going to get into trouble for sleeping with my professor?"

Hermione giggled. "Only if your Dad finds out."

Harry leant on one elbow and looked down at Hermione. "I have a funny feeling he already knows."

"You're probably right." Hermione contentedly snuggled up against Harry. "He was at the wedding service."

"I have to be honest; I don't really feel like talking about my Dad right now." Harry slid his hand under the covers to place it on Hermione's hip.

"What do you feel like then?" Hermione asked coquettishly.

"I don't know. Do you have any suggestions, Mrs. Lupin?" Harry let his hand wander, making Hermione gasp.

"I just might, Mr. Lupin." Hermione pushed Harry backwards before rolling to sit on top of him. "Now let me see..."

Earlier that day

"I now pronounce you husband and wife." The Muggle Registrar beamed at the young couple. She suspected that it must have been a bit of a hurried affair as there were so few people in attendance.

Harry grinned at Hermione and kissed her before turning to those who had been able to attend.

Virginie sniffed into her handkerchief and squeezed Severus' hand. Severus hadn't been happy about the clandestine Muggle wedding but Harry hadn't wanted to wait any longer to marry Hermione. He'd surprised her a few weeks earlier with a proposal and a request to marry before they returned to school. She'd screamed in surprise and said yes. Being of age, Harry had been able to take a trip to the Potter vault to retrieve his grandmother's engagement ring which Hermione had been touched by.

Remus, who'd stood in as best man, hugged his son and new daughter. "Congratulations. Welcome to the family, Hermione."

"Thanks, Remus." Hermione hugged her new father-in-law.

Severus held out his hand to Harry which Harry shook. "Look after my daughter."

"I will, Severus." Harry wrapped an arm around Hermione's waist. "I'd do anything for her."

Virginie felt herself tear up again at the besotted look Harry bestowed upon Hermione. "You make such a lovely couple."

"Mama." Hermione, who since she'd help Severus escape had seen little of her family, had been overcome when she'd seen both of her parents arrive. She now pulled free from Harry to hug her mother. "I'm so happy."

"I can see that." Virginie kissed Hermione on the cheek.

Dae and Anna also offered their congratulations.

Severus looked round the foyer of the Registry office. "This is not exactly where I envisaged my daughter getting married."

"Papa, we'll hold a proper wizarding ceremony once Voldie's gone." Hermione promised. "You and Mama had better go. I know we're in the Muggle section but I don't want to risk you're being caught."

Severus understood and hugged his daughter as well as Harry. "Take care and we'll see you at Christmas."

Virginie felt like crying as she said goodbye to her daughter. "I love you, my little angel."

Hermione felt her own tears welling up. "I know, Mama. I love you both of you as well. Kiss the children for me."

"We will." With that Severus and Virginie disappeared into an office they'd determined was empty. Hermione heard a small crack and she knew that her parents were now safely off to wherever they were living. She still didn't know as she had no idea who their secret keeper was and didn't want to know. She'd have hated it if Voldemort ever found out where her family was staying.

Harry kissed Hermione. "I'll see you back at Hogwarts in a little while."

"I'll be waiting." Hermione whispered.

"I need to go as well." Dae kissed Anna before laying a hand on her stomach. "Take care of our little princess."

"I love you." Anna kissed Dae desperately. Dae reluctantly let go of her before he held out an arm to Hermione, and they went into the same office as Virginie and Severus had and disappeared.

Anna looked nervously at Remus and Harry. "Let's get this done."

Remus put his arms around Anna and Harry and portkeyed them both to the Ministry.

Later that night

A few hours later Anna and Remus were in Hogwarts and Anna was looking down at the wedding band that lay on her finger. "I can't believe we had to do this."

While Voldemort had been pleased that Anna was pregnant, and had agreed to release Anna from teaching for a year so that she could have the baby, he hadn't been so happy about the baby being born out of wedlock. Remus had had to agree to marry Anna before she returned to the school; Voldemort didn't want Remus setting a bad example for the students. Remus had found himself completely thrown by Voldemort's demand; sometimes he had no idea of what made Voldemort tick.

After meeting with Voldemort, Remus then had had to tell a very pissed off Dae, who had at first had refused, until Anna had quietly pointed out that it had been their idea and not Remus' for Remus to pretend to be the father. Hoping that Voldemort might act against the Ministry before he returned to Hogwarts, Remus had put the wedding off until the very last moment. Unfortunately nothing had happened and time had ran out for them.

Remus looked at his own wedding band. "You're not alone."

Anna felt exhausted. "I can't believe how tired I feel."

Remus knew that she was probably also very stressed. "Why don't you go to bed and get some sleep? You can take my room. I'll take the spare room."

Anna put a hand on Remus' arm. "I'm sorry you had to do this."

Remus pulled Anna close to him. "You're my friends; I'd do anything to help you both, even this."

Anna could feel tears threatening. "I love the fact that I'm pregnant, but I wish I hadn't been so stupid."

"You weren't stupid, Anna." Remus led her to the sofa. "You both made a mistake in the heat of the moment. It happens."

"It should have been Dae." Anna buried her face in Remus' chest and started to cry softly.

Remus held her until she stopped. "We can put this off until tomorrow if you want to."

Anna shook her head. "Let's just get it over and done."

Remus slid an arm around Anna; he could feel her shaking. "I won't hurt you."

Anna looked up tremulously at Remus. "I'm frightened, Remus."

Remus hated that his second marriage night wouldn't be any better than his first. "I'd offer you a drink to settle your nerves but in your condition I can't."

Anna tried to smile through her tears but failed. "And normally I'd have taken you up on that offer."

Remus wiped her tears away. "Are you sure you don't want to wait?"

Anna swallowed hard, and stood up before holding out her hand. "We can only wait for so long otherwise the marriage will be considered void, Remus."

Remus got up and took Anna's hand. "I'll be as gentle as I can."

"Normally I wouldn't say this, but let's just make it as quick as you can." Anna managed a small smile.

Remus pushed her hair away from her face. "I think I can deal with that."

Neither of them moved towards the bedroom. Notwithstanding Anna's protestations that she wanted to get it over and done with, Remus realized that he was going to have to take the lead. "Let's use the spare room; you don't need the memory of this every night you go to bed."

Anna was grateful for Remus' thoughtfulness. "Thank you."

Remus pulled her gently into the room he'd offered to move into, and closed the door behind them.

Sanctuary

French carefully maneuvered his very drunk and upset Master into his bedroom. "I'll stay here with you, Master Dae."

Dae didn't answer as he'd finally passed into unconsciousness.

French tucked his Master up, and went to let his wife know that he was going to be spending the night watching over his Master.

Grimmauld Place

Sirius returned late from the hospital to find Lily still up, nursing a glass of red wine. "I thought you would have been in bed."

"I couldn't sleep." Lily's voice was slurred.

"You're drunk." Sirius knew that Lily must be upset over something to have gotten that drunk.

"I've got to go back to Hogwarts tomorrow." Lily let Sirius read into it what he wanted to.

"You mean you're actually going to miss me?" Sirius knew he sounded incredulous but he and Lily had felt like strangers during the holiday.

Lily didn't answer and took the final mouthful of wine from the glass before tipping up the now empty bottle. "I need some more."

Sirius walked around the table and removed the empty glass from Lily's hand. "I think you've had enough."

"Don't care." Lily grabbed at the third bottle of wine which was already open.

Sirius took the bottle from his wife. "Enough."

Lily tried to stand up to take the bottle back and hit the floor. "Whoops."

Sirius sighed, and slipped his arm under his wife's legs before lifting her up. "Let's get you to bed."

"Want another drink." Lily was so drunk she couldn't fight Sirius, who easily carried her up the stairs and deposited her in their bed before vanishing her clothes and pulling the covers over her. "I'll get you some hangover potions for tomorrow."

Lily shivered under the covers as she thought about Remus and Anna together. Wanting another drink, she tried to get up only to find that Sirius had returned. He quickly pushed her back down under the covers before getting undressed and wrapping himself around his very inebriated wife. "Go to sleep, Lily."

Unable to fight him and the alcohol, Lily relaxed against Sirius before falling asleep.

1st September 1997

Anna rolled over to find herself clad in pajamas and alone. Getting up she found Remus asleep on the sofa. Walking into his kitchenette, she helped herself to a ginger tea and plain biscuits. Even though she was no longer being ill in the morning, she found that she'd grown to like the tea.

Remus was awake and sitting up when she came back into the sitting room. "How are you feeling?"

"Very tired." Anna blushed.

Remus got up and led her to sit down. "Anna, I don't want you to feel uncomfortable around me now."

Anna let out the breath she hadn't realized she'd been holding. "I'm sure I'll get past the feeling, but right now I feel as if I've done something horribly wrong."

"I feel the same way." Remus admitted as he covered her with a blanket.

Anna raised an eyebrow at his gesture. "I'm not made of china, Remus."

Remus brushed aside her protestation. "I know. But it can get quite cold in here even in summer, so I'd prefer for you to stay warm. Dae would kill me if I let anything happen to you and the baby."

Anna closed her eyes as she thought about Dae. "I hope he's alright."

"French will take care of him." Remus tried to reassure Anna, even as he worried about the state of his friend.

Sanctuary

French watched as Dae opened another bottle of scotch the moment he got up. "Master Dae, you should eat something."

"Get lost." Dae snarled as he poured a large glass of the liquor.

French left and headed for the Flamels' home.

Dae groaned as Peri walked in and took the bottle off him. "Mum!"

"Dae, Anna wouldn't thank you for trying to kill yourself with alcohol." Peri cast a sobering charm on her son, who promptly threw up.

French appeared and dealt with the mess, as well as bringing an anti-hangover potion for his Master.

Dae scowled at the house-elf. "I'll deal with you later."

French ignored him and disappeared.

Peri shook her head. "You're coming to stay with me for a few days."

"I'll be fine alone, Mum." Dae just wanted to crawl into a corner and lick his wounds.

"No, Dae, you won't." Peri put an arm around her son. "French will send over some of your things. You need your family at a time like this."

Dae, who hadn't cried since Peri had offered to adopt him, buried his face into his mother's shoulder and wept.

Peri had expected Dae to be upset but was a little taken aback at how badly he was dealing with Anna's marriage. Gently she rubbed his back. "It'll be alright, Dae."

Dae looked up, his eyes red-rimmed. "It should have been my wedding night."

"I know." Peri soothed. "But you and Anna are doing whatever it takes to protect your daughter. You know what she'll be safest if Voldemort thinks she's Remus' child."

"I wish I'd never come up with the idea." Dae was beside himself.

"But you did, and you can't take it back, Dae." Peri knew that Dae would do better with the truth rather than empty placatory words. "If Voldemort ever found out who you really are, Anna's life as well as your daughter's would be in danger."

"I know." Dae wiped his eyes as he suddenly realized that he didn't want to be alone. "Let me wash my face, and I'll come with you."

Peri kissed Dae on the cheek. "I'm going to take care of you."

Grimmauld Square

Lily groaned as she woke up. Feeling sick, she spied the hangover potions sitting on the side table. Grabbing one, she quickly downed it, struggling to hold it down as her stomach threatened to rebel.

"How are you feeling?" Sirius' voice made her jump.

“Not good.” Lily admitted. “I really shouldn’t have had that second bottle.”

“Are you really that upset about going back to Hogwarts?” Sirius leant back against the headboard as he watched Lily get out of bed.

“Yes.” Lily didn’t tell him the truth of why.

“I could arrange for you to stay here.” Sirius offered, thinking that Lily had finally begun to accept their marriage.

“As much as I don’t want to go back, I want to be close to the children.” Lily closed the bathroom door behind her. When she returned, Sirius was still lying in bed. “I thought you’d be up by now.”

“I don’t have work today. I thought I’d take you and the children to the station.” Sirius offered.

“Thank you.” Still feeling a little unwell, Lily hadn’t got the energy to fight him. “I’d better make sure they’re all up and ready.”

Sirius got out of bed and went into the bathroom feeling happier about his marriage than he’d done in some time.

Later that night

Harry patrolled the corridors on his first official day back at school. He was aware that everyone thought he was in bed. He was also aware of the clandestine meeting going on in an empty classroom in the dungeons. Shaking his head at the lack of a sentry, Harry pulled open the door, and was hard put to control his giggles at the horrified looks on the children’s faces. “It’s a bit late for a class meeting isn’t it?”

Blaise stood up. “Not really. We like to get an early start on our study groups.”

“Sit down.” Harry barked. “Your excuse is pathetic.” Harry then tutted at the lack of wards, locked the door and threw up several wards to stop anyone from interfering. “I’d like to know what’s going on.”

Blaise looked nervously at the others. "As I said, it's a study group."

Harry sat down on an empty desk, his feet on the chair in front of him. "Perhaps I should tell you what I think this is."

"Go ahead." Isobella Porter stood up, and went to stand by Blaise. "Because it really is a study group."

"Nice try, Miss Porter, but I know you're lying." Harry tapped his wand against his knee. "I think that you're plotting against my Master, and that you've been doing it for quite some time."

Blaise paled a little. "I don't know what you mean."

"I think you do, Mr. Zabini." Harry wasn't going to let him wriggle off the hook. "Now, I'm going to give you two choices. Either you tell me willingly what you're doing, or I'm going to rip the knowledge from your pretty girlfriend's mind."

Isobella wondered how Alumno knew about her and Blaise. Blaise put his arm around Isobella. "I'll tell you if you promise not to hurt her."

Harry knew he had him. "Very well. I give you my word that if you tell me the truth, I'll leave her alone."

"In that case, you have my word that I'll tell you the truth." Blaise knew that, at the very least, Isobella would leave the room alive.

"I'm waiting." Harry began to tap his wand against his knee again.

"You're right. We are trying to overthrow your Master, and as such, even if we die trying, we're not letting you leave here alive to pass that information on." Blaise could hear his voice quavering, even as he and everyone else pulled out their wands.

Harry laughed. "Is that so?"

Blaise looked across at the others now standing with him. "You do realize that there are twelve of us against one of you."

Harry called his bluff. "And I could on take all twelve of you at once and still beat you. Would you like to try me?"

Even though he was frightened, Blaise didn't back off. He'd seen Alumno take down six fully grown Death Eaters in a display duel at Villa Laurifer, and he knew that as students they probably wouldn't stand a chance, but they couldn't just roll over and let him leave. "If we don't, then we're dead anyway."

"Maybe, maybe not." Harry didn't give Blaise a chance to say anything else and swept into action. "Stupefy, stupefy, stupefy, stupefy." As he sent the spells out in quick succession, he rolled backwards off the desk, providing himself with cover, which he quickly fortified with a strengthened shielding spell Lily had developed. He then easily picked off the students one by one until just Blaise remained standing.

Harry stood up. "Now what were you saying?"

Blaise knew they'd lost and decided to try the only option he felt he had left. "I want to challenge you to a duel."

"You'll lose, Mr. Zabini." Harry said quietly. "Now please, sit down and listen to me."

Blaise shook his head. "A duel. If you win then I'll agree to whatever terms you demand. However, if I win, everyone here leaves alive, and you swear an oath never to reveal what you've discovered."

"Very well." Harry touched his wand to Blaise's and they both bowed. Blaise had little time to react as Harry fired off a tickling spell which Blaise batted away easily. Harry then sent stupefy, a water spell and finally Petrificus at Blaise using the threefold spell that Lily had used on Sirius in Hogsmeade. Never having dealt with three spells all at once before, Blaise quickly dispatched the first one but not expecting the two other spells to be interwoven, ended up soaked and frozen.

Harry stood over him, took his wand and released his mouth. "Do you yield?"

Blaise was humiliated and in no position to refuse. "I do."

Harry released him from the spell and held out his hand. "I don't bite."

Blaise knew differently, but took his hand and let Harry help him up. "Thank you."

"If I enervate your friends, you're going to have to tell them to stand down and listen to me. I don't want to have waste my time stupefying them all again." Harry ordered. "Those are the terms of my win."

Blaise agreed, surprised that Alumno hadn't killed any of them. He'd been even more surprised during the duel when Alumno had only used first year spells to defeat him. "Stand back and I'll do it."

Harry passed Blaise his wand back before returning to his previous position on the desk. "Get on with it then; it's late and some of us need a little sleep."

Blaise enervated everyone; all were staggered to find themselves still alive. "So what now?"

"Now I teach you all how to defend yourselves, and how to plan to take down the Dark Lord." Harry informed them.

Even after Harry's gesture of goodwill, Blaise laughed a little cynically. "You can't really expect me to believe that you of all people are really plotting to take him down."

Harry placed his wand against his chest. "I swear on my magic and my life that the Dark Lord is my enemy and that I will do everything in my power to defeat him."

Blaise gasped as magic rippled over Harry, lifting his hair but leaving him standing and alive. "You're telling the truth."

“I am.” Harry turned to the others in the room. “I need for you all to hold hands.”

Even though they didn’t know why the Death Eater in front of them wanted to do so, everyone did as he had asked. Harry closed his eyes and enacted the Fidelius charm that Leo had taught him over the holidays. “Good. Now everything we discuss cannot leave this room nor can the memory of it be removed forcibly from you. However, I still need to make sure that none of you will betray everyone else here.”

One by one each child swore to keep the secret. Harry relaxed. “Perhaps I’d better let you know who I really am.”

Being the only Death Eater there, Blaise was curious. “You’d really show us?”

Harry slid off his mask. “Hello, Blaise.”

Blaise’s eyes became huge. “Lupin!”

“Your powers of deduction are amazing, Blaise.” Harry smirked. “Yes, it’s really me.”

“But you’re so quiet and boring.” Blaise couldn’t believe it.

“Thanks.” Harry let a dry note creep into his voice.

Blaise had the decency to blush. “Sorry.”

Harry looked round everyone. “I would have thought that Jamie would be here.”

Anna and Orion came forward. “We didn’t want him to get into trouble.”

Harry had been surprised to see his sister and brother there when he’d walked into the room. “But you’re both here.”

“We’re not the Boy Who Lived.” Orion pointed out. “Blaise said that he doesn’t trust him either.”

Harry smirked. “He might be right not to. Jamie’s Carus.”

“Bloody hell.” Blaise received his second shock of the evening.

Orion and Anna were horrified to find out that their other brother was not only a Death Eater but the Dark Lord’s apprentice as well. Anna looked near to tears. “But you’re good even though you’re a Death Eater.”

Harry hadn’t been able to resist teasing them but felt mean when he saw how upset Anna had become. “So is Jamie.”

Anna and Orion both sagged in relief. “You frightened us.”

“Sorry.” Harry turned to face Blaise. “We need Jamie; he can get the closest to the Dark Lord.”

“Talk about trying to bring down someone from inside!” Blaise exclaimed. “But how is he going to do it? He’s sworn an allegiance to the Dark Lord.”

Harry grinned. “Jamie has but I haven’t. Somehow the Dark Lord managed to miss that.”

Isobella worked out how. “That’s why you got yourself removed from the hall when You-Know-Who first came into the school, isn’t it?”

“Well spotted, Isobella.” Harry looked around the classroom. “I suggest that next time we move this meeting to a more suitable place.” Harry then stood up. “I’d like your permission before you leave to perform Legilimency on each of you. Even though you’ve all sworn oaths, I’d like to check to see if anyone is likely to betray us.”

“I don’t like the idea of that.” Isobella admitted.

“If you’ve got nothing to hide, and you don’t fight me, then I promise not to delve into areas I shouldn’t.” Harry pledged.

Blaise turned to the others. "We're doing it."

Harry stood as one by one the children moved forward until he finally came to Tracey Davis, who reluctantly submitted to him. "I'm sorry but you're going to have to be obliviated."

Tracey backed up. "You'll never win. The Dark Lord will find out one way or another."

Blaise was horrified. "Has she said anything to anyone?"

Harry shook his head. "Not as far as I can tell. She was intending to betray you all eventually; she's friends with Prewett. Hold her."

Tracey struggled but was easily subdued. Harry knew that he was going to have to involve his Dad as his obliviation skills weren't particularly good. He turned to Blaise. "I need to get someone else to do this. I can't do it myself as I might end up damaging her."

"Not so great, are you?" Tracey sneered.

Harry ignored her and left the room to fetch Remus. Remus hadn't yet gone to bed and was reading when he heard a chime which alerted him that someone was coming. Harry opened the door to his Dad's office to find Remus waiting for him. "Dad, I need your help."

"What for?" Remus knew that Harry had been patrolling.

Harry threw up a privacy bubble and quickly explained what had gone on. Remus picked up his mask and followed Harry. Just before they went into the room, Remus transfigured his clothing and slipped on a plain white mask.

Blaise felt his stomach hit the floor as another Death Eater walked in with Harry. He immediately thought that Harry had betrayed them after all. "How could you?"

Harry shook his head. "Don't be stupid, Blaise. He's here to help."

Remus advanced on the now frightened girl, and also performed Legilimency on her. "You're right, Harry. She had every intention of finding out more before passing the information onto Prewett." Remus pulled out his wand. "Obliviate." Remus then did what was necessary before stupefying the girl. He turned to Gregory Goyle. "Take her and carry her back to the dorms; use a disillusionment spell. Miss Greengrass, you will accompany him and get her into her bed."

Greg and Daphne slipped their arms around Tracey to support her and half carried, half dragged her out of the room. Remus turned to the others. "We'll all meet again one week on Saturday. Harry will let you know where."

Harry watched as Remus dropped the wards he'd erected and left the room. Blaise turned to Harry. "Who is he really?"

"I can't tell you that." Harry informed Blaise. "Only he can do that."

"But you told us about Jamie." Isobella pointed out.

"That's because I haven't sworn to keep his identity a secret." Harry admitted. "Jamie will be at the next meeting, as will several others from different houses. Please bring your wands and wear comfortable clothing as the meeting will be physical."

Harry hugged Orion and for the first time ever, Anna, before they left. "Please both be careful. You do both know that Maman is going to bust a gut when she finds out, don't you?"

Orion nodded. "Which is why we haven't told her."

"I'm not going to give you away but I think it might be best if you told her." Harry wished that his brother and sister weren't involved. "Now off to bed."

The siblings disappeared; Orion towards Ravenclaw and Anna back with the rest of her housemates, towards Slytherin.

Blaise turned to Harry. "Thank you."

“Blaise, you’re aware of what a risky game you’re playing, don’t you?” Harry sat down.

“I made a bloody huge mistake in joining, and I want to do everything I can to make up for that. A man died because of me.” Blaise hadn’t realized how terrible he would feel.

“You nearly killed Prewett as well.” Harry reminded him.

Blaise’s face turned ugly. “I know; if she hadn’t overcome the Imperius curse, then I would have.”

Harry was a little taken aback to find that Blaise had deliberately intended to dispose of his fiancée. “Why?”

“When I first started dating Ginny, I really did like her.” Blaise admitted. “But then she started to get on my nerves but my mother informed me that Ginny would make a good choice as a wife, and that I would marry her whether I wanted to or not. Even so, I started to feel hemmed in and, even though I was afraid of what my mother would do, I told Ginny I wanted to end it.”

“She didn’t take it well, I gather?” Harry could see Blaise’s loathing for his fiancée written all over his face.

“No, but all of a sudden I found that I’d changed my mind; that perhaps Ginny was the right girl for me. I even stopped seeing Isobella.” Blaise scowled. “I found out the reason for my sudden change of heart was because Ginny was using Amortentia on me.”

Harry whistled. Amortentia was banned as a Class A illegal substance. “She could go to Azkaban for that.”

Blaise grimaced. “I know. Ginny admitted to it when I challenged her; she also admitted that it was the reason for her parents’ divorce, and that Molly had suggested using it to her. Arthur found out that Molly had been using it on him for years. He didn’t report it because he didn’t want to the mother of his children to go to Azkaban, so they agreed to a divorce instead.”

“Arthur had good reason not to turn his ex-wife in but you really should have turned Ginny in.” Harry couldn’t believe that Blaise hadn’t.

“You’re right; I probably should have done exactly that.” Blaise sighed. “But by then I’d already met Flint and he’d persuaded me that serving the Dark Lord would be the answer to all of my problems. You know how that ended up. Once I saw Ginny at Villa Laurifer, I knew I had a way out. If she’d died, then it would have been the end to her and her scheming ways.”

“Did she really overcome the Imperius on her own?” Harry wondered.

“Yes, or at least I think she did.” Blaise admitted. “Either way, I’m glad that she did because the nightmares I’ve had about that day have been bad enough and she survived; I don’t know how bad they’d have been if she hadn’t. I’m now just hoping that she’ll get sick of me.”

“What about Porter?” Harry knew that Blaise had been seeing the girl on the side for some time.

“At first she was just a dalliance but I fell in love with her.” Blaise owned. “After the incident with Ginny at the Villa, I tried to explain again to my mother that I didn’t want to marry her; that I was in love with someone else. Mother threatened to cut off my inheritance if she found out that Ginny and I were anything other than a couple.” Blaise scowled. “It’s all about not losing face.”

“Does your mother know what you are?” Harry actually felt sorry for Blaise.

“Yes.” Blaise had received the worst tongue-lashing he’d ever had. “She told me that it was my bed and I had to lie in it. I also told her about Ginny being a Death Eater and she still refused to allow me to back out of the marriage as she said that I wasn’t any better.”

Harry knew he wouldn’t have wanted to be forced to marry Prewett. “I’ll help you however I can.”

"Thanks but Ginny is my problem. If I'd realized that I'd feel the way I do about Isobella, I'd have dropped Ginny long before things had gone as far as they had." Blaise looked intently at Harry. "Harry, all I really care about now is Isobella. I'm going to do whatever I can to make things right so that she has a good life, even if it's with someone else. If I can help bring the Dark Lord down, then I'm willing to do anything."

"You do know that if the Dark Lord dies, as your Mark is linked to him, it might kill you as well?" Harry enquired gently; he still wasn't sure enough about Blaise to tell him about Lily's ability to remove the Mark in its entirety.

Blaise nodded. "I know that. I also know that we can't attack him directly."

"I can and will." Harry assured him. "And you guys might be able to help to take out his men but right now, you're all in bad shape and need a lot of training, which I'm going to give you."

Blaise was quite frankly relieved. Even though he'd put together the group after listening to whisperings and rumors, he'd been floundering. "I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that Isobella doesn't have to take the Mark."

"Is that why Isobella suddenly came down with that mysterious illness and was unable to complete seventh year?" No-one had suspected anything other than a genuine illness which had meant that Isobella had had to re-sit her final year in school.

"Yes. I went to Professor Snape, and she helped me." Blaise had taken a chance that Hermione, who had openly defied Amicus and the Dark Lord to help her father and siblings escape, would also help him.

"You took a huge risk going to Hermione." Harry was shocked to find out that Hermione hadn't told him.

"It was worth it for Isobella." Blaise smiled as he thought of his girlfriend. "I'd do anything for her."

"I understand Blaise." Harry was glad to discover that the young man he'd thought so little of wasn't the shallow individual he'd always believed him to be. "I think you'd better head off to bed. It's late and we all have to be up in the morning."

Blaise held out his hand. "Thank you, Harry."

"You're welcome Blaise." Harry shook the proffered hand and slipped on his mask and left behind Blaise.

20th December 1997

Harry made his way along the corridor to the Room where he knew everyone would be waiting for him. Pushing it open he was pleased to see that everyone had already started training. Even though school was due to break up the next day, everyone had still wanted to get in one night's final practice. Harry walked over to Draco. "How's your group doing?"

Draco stopped mid-demonstration of the blood-letting curse, to answer Harry. "Fine. Unfortunately Isobella is pretty squeamish."

Isobella was looking a little green. She smiled sheepishly at Harry. "I don't do well with blood."

Harry commiserated with her. "Just hold on in there." He knew that if she ended up in battle, she'd be seeing more blood than was currently coming from the transfigured pig they were working on.

Harry wandered over to where Blaise was involved in a duel with Jamie. So far Blaise had been unable to disarm Jamie, even after trying for almost four months. Harry stopped the duel. "Blaise, come here."

Blaise wiped his brow. "I know. I keep trying but he always seems to be one step ahead of me."

“No, he’s not.” Harry had watched the last few duels between the pair. “You’re holding back. I think you’re afraid because he’s the Dark Lord’s apprentice.”

Blaise denied Harry’s allegation. “But I’m not scared of Jamie.”

“I don’t mean you’re frightened of Jamie; I mean you’re frightened of what will happen to you if you injure someone that close to the Dark Lord.” Harry explained. “As a Death Eater you’ve had it drilled into you that you’re supposed to protect Jamie, even revere him. Forget all about who he is and get back in there. And don’t forget, simplicity is sometimes better than the more complicated curses.”

Blaise wondered if Harry was right. He stepped up to Jamie and bowed. “I’m ready.”

Jamie smiled lazily and bowed, confident in his win. “So am I.”

Blaise immediately fired off a blood freezing curse, which Jamie easily batted away. “You’ve got to do better than that Blaise!” Jamie taunted him as he shot off a leg-locker curse swiftly followed by a cutting curse.

Blaise threw up a shield which dispelled both curses before firing off a water curse.

Jamie laughed as water engulfed him. “That’s hardly going to hurt me.”

Blaise ducked as Jamie tried to stupefy him, before Blaise sent two curses almost simultaneously, the first a tickling curse which Jamie dispersed but the second caught him off guard and he found himself frozen as Blaise sent a chilling spell at him. Harry grinned. “I see you remembered.”

Blaise released Jamie from the spell, and dried him off. Jamie immediately cast a warming spell on himself. Harry frowned at his brother. “You were overconfident. You expected to beat Blaise because you’ve always beaten him. If you hadn’t been so cocky and had bothered to erect a shield, you’d still be in the duel.”

Jamie looked abashed. "I know."

"Carry on." Harry walked on to sit down by Anna who was eating a large bowl of chocolate pudding, monitoring the various groups. "You're going to get fat if you keep eating like that."

Anna giggled and put a hand on her very large stomach. "I'm already fat, Harry."

Harry conjured up a spoon and helped himself to a mouthful of the chocolate pudding. "That's so good."

Anna pulled the bowl back towards her. "And it's so mine."

"I'm going to miss you in classes." Harry hated the thought of Anna not teaching him but knew that she'd only be upstairs if he needed her.

"I'm just glad that Morty's letting me take some time off." Anna knew that Voldemort was only being so generous because of Remus.

"That's because he thinks this little one is Dad's." Harry patted Anna's tummy. "It's hard to believe that there's a tiny baby in there."

"A baby I'm going to be glad to get out." Anna winced as her daughter kicked her. "She's a little madam."

"Only another few weeks and she'll be here." Harry snatched another spoonful of the chocolate pudding.

"I can't wait." Anna admitted; she felt huge and a cumbersome and just wanted to hold her daughter in her arms. "You'd best be off. Aren't you supposed to be meeting Remus?"

Harry nodded. "In about five minutes."

"I might as well come back with you." Anna held out her hand, and Harry carefully lifted her off the cushions.

When they reached his Dad's office, they found Scarlett and Cassie there. "Hello. Are you two in trouble again?"

Harry had never known a pair quite like them. They'd had more detentions than all of the other first years put together. Remus stepped back into his office. "Yes, they are. Perhaps you'd like to tell Harry and Anna what you did."

Scarlett grinned. "I turned Basil Greenback into a toad."

"How on earth did you manage that?" Anna was surprised. Human transfiguration was really difficult, and far beyond a first year's capabilities.

"We slipped him a potion." Cassie admitted. "He was being rude to us about being in Slytherin so we decided to teach him a lesson."

"And would you care to tell Harry where you got the potion from?" Remus hid his amusement at the trick the girls had played.

"From Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes Specialty Box." Cassie informed her brother.

Harry groaned as he looked at his Dad. "You're going to blame me, aren't you?"

Remus nodded. "You're the one who set up the funding for them to open their business."

"But it was such a good investment, Dad." Harry protested. "And they're doing really well."

"I'm well aware of that; just as I'm equally aware that you gave the box to your sisters." Remus looked sternly at the two girls. "When you return after the Christmas holiday you'll both be serving three nights of detention with Mr. Filch cleaning the Great Hall, and ten points each from Slytherin."

The gleeful smiles disappeared from both girls' faces. Scarlett had hoped that her Dad would be lenient with them, given that Greenback had been nasty to them but it wasn't to be. "Yes, Dad."

Remus looked over at Harry. "And I think Harry will be spending one of those nights in detention with you as well as losing twenty points for Ravenclaw."

Harry scowled at Remus. "I didn't do it."

"But it was you who brought the box into Hogwarts in the first place." Remus hid his amusement at Harry's annoyance. He turned to the girls. "You may both leave."

Cassie and Scarlett hurried out. No sooner had they gone, when Remus opened the door his private quarters. "You can come out now, Orion."

"I wondered why I didn't see you in the training room." Harry greeted his brother. "How are things going?"

"He's doing really well." Remus winked at his nephew. "He's almost as good as I am now. There's just something about the Blacks and dueling."

"Please don't lump me in with Sirius." Orion remarked.

Harry couldn't believe the difference in his brother from four months earlier, and thought back to when they'd told Orion about Sirius.

7th September 1997

"Mum, is it true?" Orion couldn't quite bring himself to believe what he was hearing. His sister was white and clutching his hand.

"I'm afraid so." Lily waited for tears from both children.

Anna immediately dissolved and ran to her mother, but Orion didn't move, nor did he cry. "So I've gone through all this crap partly thanks to Sirius."

“Sirius?” Draco couldn’t believe his cousin’s reaction.

“As far as I’m concerned, he’s no longer my father.” Orion was disgusted to learn that his father was not only Amicus, but at what he’d put everyone through.

“Orion, there’s still something we haven’t told you.” Remus put his hand on Orion’s shoulder. “Sirius wanted you to become a Death Eater at fourteen. I bought you another year by saying that I wished to make you my apprentice at fifteen. We’d hoped that the Dark Lord would have been killed by then but unfortunately it hasn’t happened.”

“So I’d be like Harry was to Sirius?” Orion asked calmly.

Remus nodded. “You’ve still got time though.”

Orion fell silent for a moment. “I want to take the Mark now.”

“No.” Lily got to her feet. “I won’t allow it.”

“Mum, you’ve already said that you can remove it when the time comes.” Orion, ever the logical Ravenclaw, pointed out. “Once Uncle Remus has given me the Mark, then you can just remove the rest and leave the part which allows me to apparate to him.”

Remus didn’t want to. “Orion, I really don’t think it’s a good idea. Your mother isn’t very happy about it.”

“What happens to me if something happens to you between now and my birthday and I haven’t taken the Mark?” Orion knew that as a high profile Death Eater something could easily happen to Remus.

“I think that either Sirius would take you on as Harry is no longer his apprentice, or you’d end up as a common Death Eater.” Remus watched Lily’s face drop.

“What happens if something happens to you and you’ve already marked me?” Orion needed to know where he stood.

“Then your sponsor could take over from me.” Remus admitted. “Orion, things could change over the next few months, and you might never have to take the Mark.”

“But you don’t really believe that do you?” Orion challenged Remus’ statement.

“No, Orion, I don’t.” Remus knew he had to be honest with his nephew.

“Then I want to take it now.” Orion stood up and held out his arm.

Remus didn’t want to inflict so much pain on his nephew. “If you do this, I’ll have to inform the Dark Lord.”

“He can’t take it, Remus.” Lily was adamant. “There’s no way I’m letting another son of my mine go down that road.”

Orion sounded calm and collected as he spoke. “It’s better this way than having to wait in anticipation for the next six months until I reach fifteen.”

“Didn’t you hear what Remus said about Harry and Jamie having to make a first kill?” Lily was shaking; she couldn’t deal with this again.

“He wouldn’t have to do that, Lily.” Remus reminded her. “He can use Harry’s doctored wand to make the kill. His heir ring will protect him against Voldemort’s probing. As long as we make everyone believe that Orion actually carried it out that would be good enough. I’m not worried about having Sirius standing over my shoulder this time.” Remus turned to his nephew. “But I’d still prefer it if you’d reconsider.”

Orion shook his head. “As I’m going to have to take it eventually, I’d rather do it on my terms; not someone else’s.” Orion held up his head. “I need to know how to beat Sirius. He’s my father, as much as it grieves me to admit, and as the Black heir I think I should be the one to take back the honor of this family.”

Harry swallowed hard. At that moment Orion reminded him more of the alternate Sirius than he'd ever done of his true father. "I should warn you that it's going to be really painful."

"I understand." Orion suddenly let his nerves and age show. "Harry, will you hold my hand while Uncle Remus does it?"

Lily stood up and knelt down in front of her son. "Please don't do this Orion. You can wait. Remus and Harry would train you without taking the mark."

Orion refused. "Mum, I can't spend the next six months getting more and more worried about what it's going to be like or worrying that something will happen to Uncle Remus, and I'll end up like Harry under Sirius' thumb. I want it a done deal. Harry said the waiting was horrendous; I just can't do that."

Harry understood and held out both hands to his brother. "If you're sure that this is what you want, then I'd be more than happy to help you get through it."

Orion nodded. "I'd rather just get it out of the way."

Lily couldn't watch and returned to sit back down by Anna, who was shaking. Jamie sat down next to Anna to hold his sister's hand. "I think you should invoke a silencing spell."

"No." Anna sat up, white faced and red-eyed. "If Orion's going to go through this, then the least I can do is to bear witness to it."

Even though she didn't want Orion to take the mark, Lily had never felt prouder of her children than she did at that moment as they all came together to support her son. "You all make me so proud to say that I'm your mother."

Orion felt tears fill his eyes at his Mum's words. "And I'm proud to be your son."

Lily got up and kissed Orion on the forehead before sitting back down to take Anna in her arms again.

Orion knelt down on the cushions that Harry had placed on the floor, and held out his left arm. "I'm ready."

"You don't have to take it on your arm." Harry realized that they'd missed that part out. "You can choose."

Wondering where it would be best hidden, Orion turned a little red-faced to the girls in the room. "Would you all mind closing your eyes for me?"

Auri, who had accompanied Draco, turned into his embrace so that her back was to her cousin. Lily pulled Anna's head to her and, in deference to her son's modesty, she also closed her eyes.

Orion dropped his trousers. "My right hipbone."

"Orion, you do realize that Maman will have to see this when she needs to undo it." Harry pointed out to his brother.

"I know but I'll get her to do it when there's no audience." Orion felt a little self-conscious but he didn't want the Mark where anyone would accidentally stumble across it.

"Very well." Remus lowered himself to his knees. "Orion, you might want to lean back against Harry."

Harry slipped behind his brother and wrapped his arms across his brother's chest. "Take a deep breath, and just listen to my voice, okay?"

"Okay." Orion could feel beads of sweat starting to form on his forehead and palms, for in spite of his brave words, he was terrified of what was about to happen.

Remus gently touched his wand to Orion's hipbone, feeling the boy start at the touch of the cold wood. "Just relax and keep talking to Harry."

Harry talked in a continuous stream about quidditch and Orion's plans for when he left school. Tightening his grip on his brother, he continued talking before meeting his Dad's eyes over Orion's head and nodding.

Orion had never known such pain as Remus incanted the spell to brand him. Unable to hold back his tears, Orion let them fall, before crying out in pain. Remus gritted his teeth and finished the mark, hurriedly reaching for a pain potion which he passed to Orion. "I'm sorry, Orion. Drink this."

Orion wiped his face and tipped the vial upwards, relishing the feeling as the potion took the edge off the pain. "That bloody hurt."

Harry released him and Orion pulled his trousers back on. "You did well. I screamed like a baby."

Anna pulled free of her mother and threw herself at Orion. "You were so brave."

"Anna, I'm alright." Orion winced as his sister accidentally knocked the mark. "Why doesn't the potion dull the pain totally?"

"Because it's linked to your soul." Lily couldn't hide the quavering of her voice. "It's going to be pretty painful when I undo it; not quite as bad, but it's going to hurt."

"I don't care." Orion declared as Remus picked up Anna and pulled him to his feet. "It's going to be worth it in the end if Cassie and Annie don't have to go through that."

"Orion, obviously I'm not going to ask you to swear allegiance to me." Remus told him. "But I'm going to have to tell the Dark Lord you've taken the Mark. First though I need to set up a 'first kill' for you."

"Let's use the Room; it can easily simulate a Muggle street." Lily suggested. "I'll wear a glamour, and Orion can use the adapted wand."

Harry got up off the floor and went into Remus' bedroom, before returning with the wand that Lily had adapted for him previously. "This is it."

Orion looked nervously at it. "Are you sure it won't hurt Mum?"

Lily took it and pointed it at Remus. "Avada Kedavra."

Remus slumped to the floor and a frightened Orion dropped down to check on his Uncle. "He's not breathing."

"It's just an illusion, Orion." Lily pulled out her normal wand. "Enervate."

Remus sat up. "See, there's nothing to worry about."

Orion's legs felt wobbly as he got up. "Can we just get this done then?"

Remus turned to Harry. "I know I didn't ask you but would you act as Orion's sponsor? That way if anything happens to me, his care will fall to you."

Orion looked hopefully at Harry who would never have refused his brother. "Of course I will."

"In that case, it's you and Orion who need to go with Lily. I'll need your memory afterwards to show to the Dark Lord." Remus informed his son.

Harry took the vial Remus was holding out and left with Lily and Orion. Twenty minutes' later they were back; Orion looking a little more relaxed than he had done earlier. "I'm glad that's over."

"I shouldn't relax too soon." Harry warned him as he passed the memory filled vial to Remus. "You've still got to meet the Dark Lord."

"He might not have to just yet." Remus picked up his mask and transfigured his clothing. "I'll be back shortly."

Villa Laurifer

Remus tapped lightly on Voldemort's door and was bade enter. "My Lord."

"Remus, what brings you here?" Voldemort hadn't been expecting to see Remus until the end of the month, especially as the previous night had been a full moon.

"Orion Black, my Lord." Remus sat down. "I wanted to inform you that he's taken my Mark."

"I thought you were going to wait until his fifteenth birthday." Voldemort wondered what had driven Remus to do so earlier.

"Well, as Hogwarts is already under your aegis, I couldn't see any reason to delay any longer. When I told him what was to come, he was eager to take the Mark now. I think he wants to make his father proud. Even though Orion hasn't started on his training yet according to Harry he performed an adequate first kill." Remus pulled out a small vial. "This is Harry's memory of it."

"Have you told Sirius yet?" Voldemort knew that Sirius would be pleased.

"No. Orion wants to wait until his fifteenth birthday to tell him as a surprise." Remus hoped that Voldemort wouldn't push to tell him sooner.

Having a sense of the theatrical, Voldemort agreed with Remus. "Excellent." He then dipped his wand into the vial and withdrew the memory, placing his wand at his forehead. A few moments later he nodded and returned the memory to the vial before passing it back to Remus. "He did well; he shows some of the same potential as his father. I approve. I'll leave it up to you to sort out his mask and name."

Remus understood he'd been dismissed, and got up to leave. "I'll see you at the end of the month then, my Lord."

“Until then, Remus.” Voldemort turned back to the book he’d been reading as Remus left to tell the others that Orion had some time before he needed to worry about meeting Voldemort and Sirius finding out.

Present Time

Harry couldn’t believe how much Orion had changed from a timid, but lovable boy to a young man who was brimming with confidence. “You’re determined to beat Sirius, aren’t you?”

“I am.” Orion now hated his father more than he could have ever imagined. Gone forever was the image of the kind, caring man who would have done anything for his family. In his place was an ogre who wouldn’t hesitate to do anything to achieve his goal.

“I’m just glad that it’s Uncle Remus and you taking care of me.” Orion smiled at them both.

“Don’t worry, Orion. I’ll always be here for you.” Remus patted his nephew on the shoulder.

Unfortunately, Remus had no idea of how wrong he was.

Next Chapter: Things take a decided turn for the worst – this will be the horrible chapter; I’m currently rewriting it, as I’m not particularly happy with it as it stands.

Chapter 65 – The World Begins to Crumble

WARNING: Things start to get very nasty in this chapter. After the first section, there is violence and bad language.

December 23rd 1997

Anna smiled happily at Dae. “So what do you think of our daughter?”

“She’s beautiful; just like her mother.” Dae kissed Anna on her head. “I love you.”

“I love you as well.” Anna felt tired but wonderful.

Downstairs Remus smiled at Harry. “Poor Dae; I think last night must have been the longest of his life.”

Harry grinned. “Did you mend his fingers?”

Remus bit out a laugh. “We both forgot about Anna’s strength. When the midwife said to hold Anna’s hands, I could barely contain my laughter when Dae began screaming.”

Dudley laughed out loud. “It must have been a bit of a shock for the midwife.”

“It was.” Remus smiled as he remembered the shocked look on the midwife’s face at the sound of snapping as Anna, in the middle of a contraction, had broken all of the fingers in Dae’s left hand. “Poor Anna had to rely on just me holding her hand after that. Dae opted to mop her brow.”

Seville, who like most of the others hadn’t seen the baby yet, was excited. “When can we see Chloe?”

“A little later.” Luna, who’d helped the midwife, informed her. “She’s going to need a little sleep first, and feeding.”

Seville sighed. “I was hoping to see her soon. I know she’s not really my sister but that’s what she feels like.”

Remus smiled softly at Seville. "I'm sure if you want to take her under your wing Anna won't complain; she's going to need all the help she can get."

Seville looked excited. "Do you really think so, Dad?" She'd asked if she could call Remus Dad just before she'd left Hogwarts to return home as that was how she felt about Remus. She didn't regard Voldemort as her father in any way even though he had made every effort with his daughter.

Remus had been delighted when Seville had asked to call him Dad, and had readily agreed for her to do so in private. "I know so."

Dae came into the sitting room. "Anna and Chloe are both asleep."

Luna wrapped her arms around Dudley. "Just think, in a few years' time that might be us."

Remus scowled. "There's no hurry to make me a grandfather just yet."

Dae laughed at his friend. "You'll love it, Remus." He then nodded towards the study. "Can I have a word?"

Remus followed his friend into his study. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to thank you for taking such good care of Anna." Dae knew that Remus had enough to do with his duties for Voldemort and Hogwarts without caring for Anna. "She said that you've bent over backwards to make sure she's well cared for."

"Dae, I've only tried to do what you would." Remus ran a hand through his hair. "I just wish it didn't have to be this way."

"Me too." Dae slumped into a chair. "I'm bloody exhausted so I hate to think how tired Anna is."

“But I’m sure she’d say that it’s all worth it for Chloe.” Remus was tired as well but his werewolf abilities meant that he was less affected than Dae.

“I know you’re already a godfather to Kai but Anna and I were wondering if you’d like to do the same again for Chloe.” Dae knew that it wouldn’t happen until Voldemort had been dispatched but he and Anna had both agreed on Remus being first choice. “We’d actually like to ask Luna to be her godmother. She’s been an absolute angel to Anna.”

“I’m sure Luna would be delighted as would I.” Remus stretched. “I think a little breakfast is in order before I go to collect the others from Nia and Grim.”

“I’d love something to eat.” Dae got up and headed out of the study.

27th December 1997

Nia cooed over the little girl she was holding in her arms. “She’s beautiful, Remus.”

While Remus had told Harry, Luna, Dudley and Hermione as well as Lily that Chloe wasn’t really his, he hadn’t informed anyone else. “Thanks. She definitely looks like Anna.”

Anna smiled over at Nia. “I actually think she looks more like her father.”

Nia shook her head. “I don’t see it.”

Remus hid his smile as did Anna. “Either way, she’s a beautiful little girl, isn’t she Dae?”

Dae sighed as he looked over at his daughter. “Adorable.”

“Would you like one of your own someday, Dae?” Grim picked up his son who was busy running all over the family room trying to get into the cupboards.

"I'd like lots of children." Dae exchanged a brief and loving glance with Anna that no-one except for Harry caught.

Grim beamed. "And how about you Anna, do you think you want more after this one?"

"I think I can wait a while." Anna laughed. "My body still feels as if it's been dropped from a great height."

"I hope that Remus is taking good care of you." Mac Jameson scowled at Remus. He'd been told the truth about Remus but he still didn't like him nor the fact that he'd married his precious daughter. The only saving grace as he saw it, was Chloe, and the fact that one day Remus would relinquish her and his daughter to Dae's care.

"He is, Daddy." Anna kissed her father on the cheek. "Now stop worrying."

Pasha and French appeared. "Dinner is served." Pasha glanced shyly over at the baby. She'd fallen for the little tyke the minute she'd laid eyes on her.

Nia passed the baby to her mother. "I think she needs changing."

Anna grimaced. "Perhaps Dae would like to help me change her. Remus, you can play host and take everyone into dinner."

Dae followed Anna up to her bedroom. "You look tired, Anna."

"I am." Anna passed Chloe to Dae. "If it hadn't been for you and the children helping out, I'd be asleep on my feet."

"I'm going to miss you when you return to Hogwarts." Dae deftly changed his daughter as he talked. "And my little angel."

"I wish I didn't have to go but Morty expects me to return with Remus." Anna felt depressed and hated the idea of having her baby in the cold castle. "I don't see why; it's not as if I'm going to be teaching."

“Harry will need your support; he’s still got exams to sit this year as well as covering for you.” Dae finished dressing his daughter and kissed her. “I know he’s good at history but he’s nowhere near your standard.”

“You flatter me.” Anna wrapped an arm around Dae’s waist and looked down at the blue-eyed baby lying in his arms. “She’s definitely got the Black mop of hair, hasn’t she?”

“You’re a beautiful little angel aren’t you?” Dae cooed at Chloe before smiling at Anna. “I love her hair but I hope her eyes don’t turn gray; I adore this color.”

A knock at the door disturbed them. “We’d better see who that is.”

Sirius was standing at the door. “I’m sorry to bother you, Anna but Sarah couldn’t make it today to check on Chloe; two other women have gone into labor. I said that as I was coming to dinner, I might as well do it.”

Anna hid her dislike of Sirius. “That’s fine Sirius. I’m sure checking Chloe over can wait. I don’t want to disturb your relaxation time like this.”

“It’s not a problem.” Sirius held out his hands for the little girl, and Dae reluctantly relinquished his daughter to his brother.

Anna placed a hand on Dae’s arm as Sirius checked her over with his wand. “She’s doing just fine. How are you feeling?”

“Tired and a little tearful.” Anna admitted. “But I’m sure I’ll get over it.”

Sirius passed Chloe to her mother. “Hold her and I’ll check you to make sure everything is okay.”

Anna stood quietly as Sirius ran his wand over her. “You’re physically well. If you still feel down, then speak to Poppy once you return to school.”

“Thank you.” Anna wrapped Chloe’s blanket around her. “Perhaps we should all go down now.” She turned to Dae and blew a kiss at him; with her back to him Sirius was unable to see her expression. “Thanks for standing in for Remus and helping with her.”

“Anytime.” Dae placed a hand on Anna’s back. “After you.”

The group headed downstairs, and into dinner.

29th December 1997

Lily gave a small scream of fright as she opened the shower door to find Sirius standing there. Grabbing a towel she held it against her body. “Sirius, what are you doing here?”

Sirius pushed away from the wall he was leaning against. “The conference finished early so I thought I’d surprise you.”

Lily smiled nervously. “You certainly did that.”

Sirius tugged at the towel. “You’re being a little modest aren’t you?”

Lily kept a firm grip on the towel. “I’m wet, Sirius.”

Sirius grinned playfully. “I don’t care.” Sirius tugged once more and the towel came away.

Lily watched Sirius’ expression change as the towel fell to the floor revealing her body. Not expecting him home, and having just gotten out of the shower, Lily hadn’t applied any of the balm that Severus had created for her. Futilely, Lily tried to cover herself with her hands as she backed away.

Sirius advanced on Lily and grabbed her by her arms, pulling her hands away from her breasts. “You cheating bitch.”

Lily gasped as Sirius slapped her across the face, the force of the blow knocking her onto her knees. “Sirius, please no.”

Sirius picked up her bodily from where she'd fallen to her knees, holding her arms at her sides. "Did you think I'd never find out?"

Lily didn't answer. Sirius pushed her backwards towards the wall, slamming her hard against it. "No wonder you didn't want to sleep with me. All this time you've been fucking Lupin instead, haven't you?"

Lily screamed as Sirius pulled her forward slightly before smashing her back against the wall again, causing her head to impact the tile, breaking it. "No."

Sirius thought back to the night when he'd found Lily at home drunk. "That's why you were drunk before you left to return to Hogwarts isn't it? It wasn't because you were going to miss me; it was because it was Lupin's wedding day wasn't it?"

Lily let out a sob. "I don't remember."

"I think you do." Sirius put his mouth close to Lily's ear. "He'll never leave his wife for you; she's just given birth to his child."

"I haven't been sleeping with Remus." Lily tried to break free but Sirius was holding her too tightly.

Sirius ignored her struggles and marched her to the mirror. "Then what do you call that?"

Lily didn't look so Sirius grabbed her hair forcing her head up and made her look in the mirror. "Look at it."

Lily glanced at her reflection. The bite mark Remus had left stood out lividly against the pale skin of her breast.

"Let's try again shall we?" Sirius kept his hand in her hair. "You've been fucking Lupin, haven't you?"

Knowing that it would do no good to deny it, Lily nodded. "I love him."

Sirius let out a scream of rage and threw Lily away from him against the mirror, breaking it and cutting open her head. "You Mudblood whore."

Lily wiped away the blood that was already starting to trickle down into her eye. "I'd rather be his whore than your wife."

Sirius backhanded her with enough force to send her crashing to the floor. Lily lifted her head, blood now pouring from her mouth as well as her head. "I hate you."

Incensed, Sirius grabbed her arm and pulled her up before backing her against the wall again. "I loved you. I would have done anything for you. Even died for you. And for what? For you to go running to that lowlife werewolf like a bitch in heat."

"Go to hell." Lily tried to knee Sirius in the groin but missed.

Sirius kicked Lily's legs from under her and forced her to the ground before sitting on top of her, and placing his hands around her throat. "Just tell me why."

"Because he's ten times the man you are." Lily knew she was going to die, and she wanted Sirius to know the truth about how she felt about Remus.

At Lily's words, Sirius grew even angrier, and began to squeeze, watching impassively as Lily started to struggle as she gasped for air. "You'd be nothing without me. If I hadn't begged for your life, your body would be rotting with Potter's."

Lily sucked in air as Sirius let up slightly on the pressure. "You only wanted me because he had something you didn't."

"Fuck you." Sirius backhanded her again before beginning to tighten his grip around her throat again.

Lily closed her eyes and waited for him to finish it, only to open them again when the pressure ceased.

“Before I finish this, I think Lupin’s wife deserves to know what a cheating bastard she’s married.” Sirius climbed to his feet and pulled an unresisting Lily against him before apparating them both out to Grimmauld Square.

Anna span round at the sound of a crack, a smile on her face, expecting to find Dae standing there. Instead she was horrified to find a bloody and naked Lily being roughly held up by Sirius. “Sirius, what’s going on?”

Sirius pulled Lily’s hair back. “Tell her what’s going on, Lily.”

Holding Chloe, Anna couldn’t go to Lily’s aid. “Sirius, whatever it is, you don’t need to do this.”

“Tell her.” Sirius screamed at his wife.

“I slept with Remus.” Lily sobbed. “I’m sorry.”

“It doesn’t matter, Lily.” Anna hushed Chloe, who had begun to cry at the sound of Sirius’ yelling. “Sirius, let Lily go.”

“No.” Sirius tightened his grip on Lily’s hair. “Where’s Lupin?”

“Out.” Anna rocked her daughter, who was obviously picking up on the tension she was feeling. “He won’t be back for a while.”

“Pity.” Sirius pushed Lily down onto her knees. “I’d have liked for him to see the repercussions of his actions.”

Anna felt her blood run cold. “What do you mean?”

“This.” Sirius pointed his wand at Lily’s head. “Avada...”

“No!” Orion screamed as he stood in the doorway. “Let Mum go, Dad.”

Sirius ducked as Orion sent a stunning spell at him. “Orion, she deserves it.”

“Get away from my mother.” Orion sent a threefold spell at Sirius who, after dealing with Lily’s attack previously, easily dealt with the spells before stupefying his son.

Sirius turned to Anna. “Where the hell did he learn those spells?”

Anna was frightened for her daughter and didn’t want to upset Sirius any more than he already was. She decided to tell Sirius the truth. “Orion’s taken the Mark already. He’s now Remus’ apprentice.”

“Not any more he’s not.” Sirius had a feeling that Anna knew who he was, and held up a hand as she backed away. “Don’t think of going anywhere, Anna.”

Anna was trapped. Sirius was blocking the way to the fireplace, and she couldn’t portkey or apparate with Chloe as she was far too young. “What do you want, Sirius?”

“Your husband’s head on a platter.” Sirius kept his wand drawn. “Now come here.”

Anna shook her head and pulled her daughter closer to her. “No.”

“I don’t want to hurt you or your daughter, Anna, but I will if I have to.” Sirius threatened. “If you know who I am, then you also know I won’t hesitate to do it, so get here.”

Having little choice, Anna slowly walked over to Sirius, trying not to look at Lily. Sirius pulled her towards him and then slowly made her walk towards the sitting room. “We’ll all wait for that bastard right here.”

“Please don’t hurt my baby.” Anna’s main fear was for her daughter.

“If Lupin does as he’s told when he gets back, you’ll both be fine. You have my word.” Sirius motioned for Anna and Lily to both kneel down in front of him.

Anna could see Lily shivering. “At least get her something to put on.”

Sirius at first refused Anna's request. "She doesn't deserve anything."

Anna tried a different tack. "I don't want to look at the body of the woman who slept with my husband."

Seeing her point, Sirius transfigured a cushion off the sofa behind them into a cloak and threw it at Lily. "Anna finds you offensive; get yourself covered up."

Lily couldn't look at Anna but was grateful for her friend's quick thinking.

Anna had never known twenty minutes to be so long, and she almost collapsed in both relief and fear as heard the sound of footsteps coming up the front path. Sirius lifted his wand as the door opened, and voices floated over to him.

Remus opened the door and the first thing he saw was Orion lying on the floor. Dashing over to him, he turned to Harry and the others as he sniffed the air and smelt blood. "Check the other rooms."

"Don't bother." Sirius called out. "You may as well just come here, Lupin."

Remus picked up Orion and carried him towards Sirius. "What's going on?"

"Your wife will tell you." Sirius dropped the disillusionment spell that he'd placed on the two women as the door began to open.

Remus paled as he saw the two women. "Why, Sirius?"

"Anna, if you would." Sirius gently touched his wand to Anna's neck.

"He found about you and Lily, Remus." Anna's voice trembled.

Remus knew that Anna was frightened for Chloe rather than herself. "I'm sorry, Anna."

"It's okay, Remus." Anna gave a small smile.

"But it's not okay, Lupin." Sirius grabbed Lily's hair making her cry out just as Remus started forward. "Don't even think about, Lupin. You're too far away; one of them would be dead before you even made it halfway across the room."

Remus halted. "So what do you want?"

"I want you to pay for what you've done." Sirius' voice was calm but deadly.

"Fine, then make me pay, but leave Lily and Anna out of this." Remus demanded as he passed Orion to Harry and Dudley who were standing behind him. "Get him out of the way."

Seville stepped around the corner. "Let them go, Sirius."

"The Dark Lord's brat." Sirius didn't particularly like Seville as he thought her weak and undeserving of the position she held.

"I said let them go." Seville tried to keep her voice steady.

"I might serve your Master, and I'll do so until the day I die but you're nothing." Sirius snarled at her. "Now I suggest you back off before you make me do something I won't regret."

Before Seville could do anything stupid, Hermione stepped out of the shadows and pulled the girl back against her. There was something in Sirius' expression that terrified Hermione and she was afraid that he'd gone over the edge.

Sirius scowled. "So my darling daughter is also in town." He sent a pointed look at Harry. "I thought I told you to drop her."

"I invited her over." Luna interjected. "Harry hasn't spoken to her all afternoon."

Sirius looked expectantly at Harry. "Is this true?"

Afraid for Lily and Anna, Harry agreed with Luna. "Yes, apart from school I've barely spoken to her at all."

"Keep it that way." Sirius ordered. "Now for my payment."

Orion, who'd been enervated by Dudley, looked pleadingly at his Dad. "Why are you doing this?"

Sirius turned to Remus. "Why don't you explain to Orion why I'm doing this?"

Not waiting to hear Remus' answer, Orion started to move forward. "Please let them go, Dad."

"Just stay where the fuck you are." Sirius snapped out making Orion jump.

Orion froze at the harsh tone of his Dad's voice. Sirius tapped his wand against Lily's head. "I'm waiting, Lupin."

Remus hesitated and Sirius whispered a spell. Lily began to scream as blood appeared from cuts on her face. "Okay. Just stop hurting her."

Sirius dropped the spell. Remus turned to Orion. "I'm in love with your mother."

"I think there's a little more to it than that." Sirius ground out.

"I've slept with her." Remus admitted.

Harry put his arm around Orion as his brother's face fell. "Uncle Remus?"

"He shouldn't blame Lupin entirely, now should he Lily?" Sirius smiled nastily at his wife. "Tell your son what a willing Mudblood whore you've been for the werewolf."

Lily let out a sob. "I wanted to sleep with Remus. I love him."

“Now we’ve got confession time out of the way, it’s time for the main event.” Sirius released his wife and placed his wand at Anna’s neck instead. “Unless you want to watch me send your wife and daughter to an early grave, I’ve got a task for you, Lupin.”

Remus felt his stomach go over. “What is it?”

“I’ve almost finished Lily off twice since I found out about you but I’ve decided that as you’re cause of all my problems, you’re also going to be the one to deal with them. Now, you’re going to walk slowly over here and then you’re going to do exactly as I tell you.” Sirius informed him.

Harry paled as he realized what Sirius wanted. “Sirius, please don’t do this.”

“Harry, I’m sorry but she’s nothing but a tramp.” Sirius scowled at Remus. “You knew how I felt about infidelity didn’t you? You know what I did to Eleanor. Why should Lily be treated any differently?”

Remus looked briefly at Lily, who by now wore a resigned look, before answering. “Because Lily is the mother of your children, Sirius. I’m the one who seduced her. I caught her at a vulnerable moment. It’s not her fault.”

“She’s wearing your mark, Remus.” Sirius barked out. “I’m not fucking stupid. I know exactly what that means.”

Remus cursed himself for ever giving in to his urges. “Please, Sirius. Think about what it will do to your family.”

“You should have thought about the consequences more clearly before you slept with my wife.” Sirius wasn’t letting Remus or Lily off the hook. “Now get over here.”

Orion shook his head. “No.” He looked at Remus. “Don’t let my Mum die.”

Remus felt like crying at the despondent look on Orion's face, and tried one last plea with Sirius. "Sirius, for Orion's sake, if nothing else, please let Lily go."

Sirius looked at his son's desperate face. "Orion, someone has to pay for what they've done."

"I've already said it's my fault." Remus interrupted.

Sirius ignored Remus' comment. "But because I love you, Orion, I'm going to give Remus a choice."

Remus knew that it wasn't going to be good. "What choice?"

"You can either deprive Orion of his mother, or little Chloe's relationship with her mother is going to come to a premature end." Sirius watched as the realization of what he was asking sank in with everyone. "You've got one minute to decide. Who's it going to be: your wife or your lover?"

Harry, like the other children, had kept his wand drawn but knew that he couldn't do anything; he'd be incapacitated before the spell left his wand. "I'll take their place."

"This is why I chose you as my protege originally. You're not only powerful but loyal and brave as well; qualities most Death Eaters lack." Sirius smiled ruefully at Harry. "I'm sorry, Harry, but my decision stands, and Lupin now has twenty seconds left."

Remus felt trapped. "You can't honestly expect me to pick."

"But I do, or I'm going to pick for you." Sirius tapped his wand gently against Anna's head. "Time's up, Lupin. What's it to be?"

Remus found that his mouth had dried up.

"I'll decide for you then." Sirius steadied his wand against Anna's head. "Avada..."

Next Chapter: I've got a lot of this done but I'm reworking parts of it. I hope to post Monday or Tuesday of next week.

Chapter 66: Avada Kedavra

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"I'll decide for you then." Sirius steadied his wand against Anna's head. "Avada..."

Remus held up his hand. "No."

Sirius hesitated. "So you're choosing Lily then?"

Remus nodded dejectedly. "I'm sorry, Lily."

"I understand, Remus." Lily knew that Remus couldn't let Anna die.

Sirius smirked maliciously at his wife. "I told you he'd put his wife first." Sirius turned to Remus. "Now, I suggest you move slowly over here, and get on with it."

Lily looked over to Remus. "Do it, Remus."

"No." Orion couldn't stand by and watch his mother die. "Don't do it, Uncle Remus."

"Orion, honey. Remus has got to do it." Lily hated that she couldn't hold her son for one last time. "Anna and Chloe are innocent. Please don't do anything stupid."

Orion started to cry and Harry pulled his brother into his arms.

"Enough prevaricating, Lupin." Sirius was getting fed up with the delay. "Or I can easily finish off what I began."

Knowing he couldn't let Anna die for something he and Lily had done, Remus took a step towards Sirius. "I need my wand. It's in my study."

"You can't expect me to believe that you don't have a wand on you?" Sirius looked suspiciously at Remus.

Remus rolled up his sleeve to reveal his empty holster. "My main wand is being repaired. I damaged it in a duel with Orion. It's where I'd gone out to today."

"Very well." Sirius put his wand back against Anna's neck. "You've got thirty seconds."

Remus hurried to his study, returning a few moments later with his wand in his hand. Sirius turned to Anna. "Get up." Anna unsteadily got to her feet, still cradling Chloe. Sirius then wrapped his arm around her waist and backed her away. "Now, Lupin, get on with it or I swear the next spell I cast will send your wife to her death."

Knowing that Sirius would do exactly as he promised, Lily climbed to her feet and took Remus' hands and placed them on her face. "Tell me you love me."

Remus looked into Lily's bloodied face, and thought she'd never looked more beautiful. "I love you more than life itself."

Sirius didn't want to see their loving goodbyes. "I think that's enough."

Lily stepped away from Remus; even though she was frightened of dying, she was more frightened of Sirius hurting Anna and Chloe. "I love you."

Remus raised the wand. "I'm so sorry, Lily. Avada Kedavra."

Lily closed her eyes as a flash of green filled the room. Orion cried out and tried to free himself from Harry's embrace but Harry wouldn't release his brother. "Orion, you can't do anything."

Remus reached out and grabbed Lily as she fell, before carefully lowering her to the floor. "Now let my wife go."

Sirius shook his head. "The game's not quite over yet."

Harry knew what Sirius wanted. "No."

Luna felt Dudley start, and she wrapped her arms around his waist. "He'll kill Anna, Dudley."

Dudley felt impotent but like Orion, could do little other than watch.

"I see Harry and Dudley have already guessed what's coming next." Sirius laughed nastily. "You didn't think I'd let you live, did you?"

Remus hadn't. "Someone will take you down one day, and when they do, I'll be cheering them on."

"But you won't, because you'll be dead." Sirius felt Anna recoil, and he tightened his grip on her. "Now I think it only poetic justice that you die by the same wand you've just killed that whore with."

Harry held onto Orion as the tears he'd held back as he'd comforted his brother began to fall. "But what about Orion? He's taken Dad's Mark; it'll kill him."

"No, Harry, it won't." Sirius kept his gaze firmly on Remus. "The Mark binds your soul yes, but you didn't think our Master would obliterate his army if he died did you? There are always ways to bring people back, and he wouldn't kill those who could do that."

Harry knew that Orion hadn't been in any danger as Lily had already removed the damaging parts of the Mark, but he was stunned to discover that the Mark wouldn't destroy them as they'd thought. "I'm going to kill you if you do this."

"Of course you are." Sirius lifted an eyebrow. "I think it's time for the show to end, Lupin."

Remus looked at Harry who had tears streaming down his cheeks as he hugged his brother. "It'll be alright, Harry."

"Dad, don't. I'll take your place." Harry could barely get his words out.

"No, you won't Harry." Sirius tightened his grip on Anna making Chloe begin to cry as she was crushed against her mother. "I'm waiting."

Remus looked at his son. "It has to be this way."

Unable to look, Anna closed her eyes as Remus put the wand to his heart. "Avada Kedavra."

"NO." At Harry's scream, all of the windows blew out in the house. Orion winced as magic crackled over him.

Hermione gasped as she looked at her husband. Harry's hair was gently being lifted and his eyes had turned completely black. "Oh Merlin."

Harry let go of Orion. "As I said, I'm going to kill you for this."

Sirius wasn't put off by Harry's appearance; he'd already seen him like this before. "That's going to be a bit difficult as you've sworn not to harm me. You'd be dead before the spell left your wand."

"Release me from my oath then." Harry demanded.

"Now why would I want to do that?" Sirius asked in a smug voice.

"Because if you don't, then you'll have just proven that you're the coward I know you are." Harry snarled.

Sirius' face changed at Harry's implied insult. "Very well. But don't say I didn't warn you. I'll agree to a duel on pureblood terms. No-one may interfere and the victor leaves unharmed." Sirius took his wand away from Anna's neck. "You'll need to accept my offer."

"Accepted." Harry held up his wand to touch Sirius' own.

Sirius released Anna and Chloe. "You are both free to go."

Anna walked over to where Hermione was comforting a distraught Seville. "Seville, I need you to take Chloe for me."

Hermione looked at Anna. "You can't stay here, Anna."

"I love Harry like a son, Hermione. I can't leave him to face Sirius alone." Anna brushed Seville's hair out of her eyes. "Please Seville; Chloe needs to be safe."

A shaking and white faced Dudley stepped over to them. "I'll take them to Mum's."

Anna let out a sigh of relief. "Thank you Dudley."

Dudley took Chloe from Anna and put his arm around Seville. "Come on." He looked over at Luna. "Luna, we need to go."

Luna shook her head. "I'm staying."

Harry didn't want her there. "No, I want you safe." He turned to Hermione and Anna. "I want you two gone as well. Take Orion."

Anna stood her ground. "I'm going nowhere, Harry."

Sirius scowled. "Would whoever is going just go?"

Dudley stepped over to the fireplace, Luna moving to join him. "Harry, take care."

"I will, Dud." Harry motioned towards the stairs. "This is hardly a suitable place for this to take place; I suggest we use the dueling room upstairs."

Seville hesitated by the fireplace. "Please don't do this Harry. I can't bear to lose you too."

"I've got to, sweetie." Harry marched over to where Seville was standing and hugged both her and Luna. "Now go."

Once the children had flooded out, Harry turned to the others. "Please reconsider." When all three refused to do so, Harry scowled. "If you stay, then do not attempt to interfere in any way. If you do, you'll forfeit your own life."

"We understand." Anna looked over Orion's head as he'd gravitated to her. "But we're not leaving you."

The small group then made its way to the dueling room. Once there, Anna, Hermione and Orion stood quietly at the side of the room as Harry moved to the center of the room, and bowed to Sirius. "Release me from my oath."

"I release you from your oath for the duration of this duel." Sirius bowed back. "It's not too late to change your mind."

"Coward." Harry knew that it would annoy Sirius; he wasn't wrong, as a blasting curse headed his way.

"You are so going to regret that, Harry." Sirius didn't hold back and sent spell after spell at Harry without any regard for the damage he was doing.

Harry had never faced Sirius like this before and, despite putting up a valiant effort, was eventually overwhelmed as his shield exploded and a simple stupefy hit him full in the face.

Sirius walked across the room to stand over a now unconscious Harry. He looked at the others. "Do you think he might have had any last wishes?"

Orion couldn't look and turned in Anna's embrace to bury his face in her shoulder.

Hermione stepped forward. "That you rot in hell." Anna grabbed Hermione, and pulled her close to her so that she couldn't interfere; she'd seen Hermione's hand starting to move, and she was afraid of what she might do.

Anna watched as Sirius removed both of Harry's wands, throwing them across the room, before petrifying him and enervating him. "You're beaten, Harry. Do you yield?"

Orion pulled free of Anna's grasp at Sirius' words and crying, walked over to his brother. "Please, Harry. You can't win."

Harry knew Orion was right. "I yield."

Sirius stepped away. "I accept your surrender." Sirius then healed Harry's injuries.

As soon as he'd finished, Anna marched over and slapped him hard across the face. "You'd better not come near my family again. Now get out of my house."

Sirius was surprised at the force of Anna's slap, and wiped the blood away from his mouth where she'd split his lip. "This isn't your house, Anna. So I'll do as I please."

"Actually, it is my house." Anna took great delight in informing him. "Even though it still belongs to the Potter Estate, Harry signed all the rights in it over to Remus and me to live here with our heirs until none remain. At that time, the house reverts back to the Potter estate. So I'm not going to say it again, Black. You are no longer welcome here."

"I think Harry might have some different to say." Sirius turned to face Harry. "Don't you?"

"No, Black, I don't." Harry picked up his wands. "I can't undo what I've done. Anna is telling the truth; the house is now hers to do with as she pleases."

Sirius sent a look of disgust at Anna. "My condolences to the widow." He then pulled open the door and stalked out of the room before apparating away.

Anna collapsed as soon as he disappeared and burst into tears. Harry ran over to her, and sank to the floor with her, as did Orion and Hermione.

Ten minutes later, Dae burst into the dueling room to find Anna surrounded by the three children. "Where's Chloe?"

Anna glanced up at Dae, her face tearstained. "She's with Seville at Nia's."

Dae hurried over to Anna and pulled her to feet before embracing her. "I thought the worst when I saw Remus and Lily. I thought I'd lost you."

Orion wiped his eyes as he saw the look Dae was giving Anna. "Anna?"

Anna looked down at Orion. "I'm sorry we didn't tell you this before but Dae is Chloe's Dad, not Remus."

"But Uncle Remus killed Mum for you." Orion was horrified.

"Remus had sworn to protect me and Chloe with his life, Orion." Anna gently explained. "Even though I'm in love with Dae, I did love Remus as well."

Orion dropped his head into his hands. "I think it's time someone told me everything."

Dae knelt down. "Orion, look at me."

Orion lifted his head. "Why do you look different?"

"I'm not really Dae Venant; well, I am but I used to be someone very different." Dae smiled softly. "Can't you guess who?"

Orion looked closely at the man kneeling in front of him. "Your eyes!"

"I used to be Regulus Black; I'm actually your uncle." Dae then proceeded to tell his shocked nephew exactly what had happened to him. "Remus agreed to step in as Chloe's father to keep her safe from your father and the Dark Lord."

"I can't go home." Orion couldn't face Sirius. "Can I stay here?"

Anna looked at Harry. "Can Black get through the wards?"

“Not if I...” Harry’s words died away as Orion suddenly disappeared.

Grimmauld Place

Sirius activated Orion’s heir ring, and waited for his son to appear.
“Hello, Orion.”

Orion immediately tried to apparate out only for nothing to happen.
“Let me go; I hate you.”

“I know you do.” Sirius stepped forward only for Orion to back away.
“Orion, I’m going to have to tell the others what happened today, and I want you there when I do.”

Orion shook his head. “As Hermione said, you can rot in hell.”

Sirius’ face took on a cold, hard look. “In that case I have something I need you to do. You’re going to visit your Aunt and you’re going to make sure that she tells everyone that your mother and Lupin died in a Death Eater attack.”

Orion looked incredulously at his father. “Like hell I will.”

“If you don’t, I know I can’t hurt you, but there are plenty of others I can.” Sirius pulled out his wand. “Starting with your insipid girlfriend.”

Orion felt as if his heart had stopped. “How do you know about her?”

“I know more than you think.” Sirius stared intently at his son. “And if she isn’t enough to encourage you to do as you’re told, I can always take it out on your brother and his precious family.”

“He’s no longer your protégé.” Orion pointed out.

“He may have left the ranks of trainee, but he still bears my Mark, and as such is still subservient to me.” Sirius looked expectantly at Orion.
“Now, I’m going to drop the wards, and you’re going to do as I asked, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Sir.” Orion knew he had little choice in the matter. He promptly apparated out as Sirius left the room to tell his children about their mother.

Later that evening

Sirius finished dosing his children with dreamless sleep potion before checking the time, and heading downstairs into the sitting room where Narcissa was waiting for him.

A red-eyed Narcissa was sitting down, a drink in her hand. “I still can’t believe it.”

“I’m finding it hard to believe myself.” Sirius sat down opposite her.

“When’s the funeral?” Narcissa blew her nose before taking a mouthful of the brandy.

“I don’t know yet.” Sirius realized that he hadn’t brought Lily’s body back with him.

“Craig said to take as much time as you need.” Narcissa had asked Craig to stay at home with Lizzie and Draco.

“Thank you.” Sirius stood up. “I’ve got to go look for Orion.”

Narcissa hadn’t known that he wasn’t there. “Where is he?”

“He was upset when I told him and he apparated out of here.” Sirius headed towards the door.

“He can apparate?” Narcissa was surprised.

“I taught him for emergencies.” Sirius lied. “I really must go.”

“I’ll stay up until you get back.” Narcissa promised before urging him out. “Go look for your son.”

Sirius headed upstairs before apparating out.

Villa Laurifer

Sirius tapped on Voldemort's door and entered when bade. "My Lord."

"Sirius, what brings you here?" Voldemort watched as Sirius removed his mask.

"I have grave news." Sirius took a deep breath. "My wife and Lupin are both dead."

"What happened?" Voldemort poured out a large scotch and passed it to Sirius, who took it gratefully.

"I found out that she'd been sleeping with Lupin, so I forced him to kill her before killing himself." Sirius waited for the explosion that didn't happen.

"It's an inconvenience I could have well done without." Voldemort understood what had driven Sirius to do it though. "How's Harry?"

"Pissed at me." Sirius admitted. "He challenged me to a duel."

"So he's dead as well?" Voldemort couldn't afford to lose anyone else.

"No; I taught him a lesson and forced him to yield." Sirius had known that Voldemort wouldn't have taken kindly to him killing Harry off for defending his parents' deaths.

"Summon him." Voldemort wanted to speak to the boy.

Harry knocked on Voldemort's door a few minutes later. "My Lord." He blatantly ignored Sirius.

"My condolences on the death of your parents, Harry." Unlike Sirius' sarcastic comment to Anna, Voldemort actually sounded as if he meant it. "You can remove your mask."

"Thank you, my Lord." Harry removed his mask, knowing his face would show his grief.

"How is Anna faring?" Voldemort focused his full attention on Harry.

"She's upset, as anyone would be if they'd been threatened by him." Harry nodded towards Sirius but still didn't look at him.

Voldemort swung round. "Sirius?"

"I needed leverage; Anna and her daughter were it." Sirius wasn't bothered by what he'd put Anna through.

"Was my daughter there?" Voldemort asked unexpectedly.

Sirius nodded. "She was."

"And she's unharmed?" Voldemort addressed the question to Harry.

"Yes, my Lord, she is." Harry scowled at Sirius. "Again, no thanks to him."

"I'd like to see her." Voldemort turned and looked at Sirius. "You will stay here."

Sirius gave Harry a look which spoke volumes. "Yes, my Lord."

Voldemort turned to Harry. "Shall we go?"

Harry hesitated. "Seville is with my Mum. I'll collect her and bring her here."

"You can collect her and I'll meet you at Grimmauld Square." Voldemort ordered.

Harry felt his stomach drop but could do nothing except bow and apparate out. Voldemort quickly followed behind, leaving Sirius alone to contemplate events.

Grimmauld Square

After dealing with Lily and Remus, Dae, Anna and Hermione had just gone into the sitting room when a tiny crack signaled someone had apparated in. Dae got up and walked out, only for his blood to run cold as he came face to face with Voldemort. He decided to play it cool. "Lord Voldemort, I presume?"

"And you are?" Voldemort knew exactly who Dae was from the Ministry records he'd appropriated.

"Felidae Venant." Dae wasn't going to pay any sort of respects to Voldemort by tagging 'my Lord' on to his response.

Anna hurried out with Hermione behind her. "Lord Voldemort."

"Anna." Voldemort turned his back on Dae to speak to Remus' widow. "My sincere sympathies on your loss."

Anna was thrown for a moment. Even though she and Voldemort had spoken when he'd come to visit Seville, it was rarely beyond 'good morning' or 'goodnight'. "Thank you."

"May we talk?" Voldemort looked pointedly at Hermione and Dae.

Anna waved her hand towards the sitting room. "We can go into the sitting room."

Voldemort turned to Hermione. "My daughter will be arriving shortly with Harry. Send them in when they arrive."

As the doors shut behind the pair, Dae let out the breath he'd been holding. "Shit. I didn't expect that."

"Neither did I." Hermione had been beyond astounded to see Voldemort in the hallway; even more so by his acting so nicely.

Another crack signaled Harry's return, his arm wrapped round a miserable and pale Seville. "Is he here?"

Dae nodded. "In the sitting room; he wants you two to go in."

Harry kept his arm around Seville's waist. "Sorry, Dae."

"Don't sweat it." Dae waved off Harry's apologies as he watched him lead Seville into the room before closing the doors.

Voldemort stood up as Seville came in. "Seville, come here."

Seville tentatively moved over to her father, and was surprised to find herself wrapped in a hug, particularly as Voldemort never usually showed any sort of affection towards her in front of others. Unable to help herself, she burst into tears again. Voldemort rubbed his daughter's back. "I'm sorry."

"Sirius forced Uncle Remus to kill them, Father." Seville managed to sob out as Voldemort continued to comfort her. "I thought he was going to kill Anna and Chloe as well."

Voldemort released his daughter and sat her down in front of the fireplace where he'd lit a fire. "Take a deep breath and tell me what happened."

In between hitched sobs, Seville told him everything. By the time she'd finished, Voldemort didn't look very happy. "Sirius is going to be sorry he threatened you."

Anna wasn't surprised that Voldemort was being so loving towards his daughter; Seville looked terrible. "What will happen to Seville now, my Lord?"

"I'd like for her to stay with you." Voldemort laid a hand on his daughter's head. "Is this acceptable to you?"

Seville looked at Anna who nodded. "I'd like that."

"That's settled then." Voldemort straightened up; his face becoming businesslike again. "Anna, I'm still going to need you to return to Hogwarts as planned. You're going to have to step in to take Remus' place as headmistress."

“But what about the Board of Governors?” Anna knew that there was going to be an uproar.

“They belong to me and will do exactly as I tell them to.” Voldemort left Anna in no doubt as to where the Governors’ loyalties lay. “But I do have a problem replacing Remus for the Dark Arts position; it was bad enough trying to find a transfiguration teacher at short notice.”

Anna suddenly had an idea. “I may know of someone but they won’t take the Mark.”

Voldemort mulled it over. “If they will agree to swear allegiance to me, then I will accept that for the time being.”

“Excuse me for a moment.” Anna slipped out. When she returned, Dae was with her. “Dae will step into Remus’ position.”

Voldemort walked over to face Dae. “Why would you do this? I know you’re pretty well placed in the Ministry.”

“Remus was my friend as is Anna.” Dae didn’t look away, even though Voldemort was staring at him like a hawk eyeing its prey. “But I won’t do it if I’m required to take the Dark Mark.”

“How do I know you’re qualified?” Voldemort ignored Dae’s remark.

“You’ve obviously seen my records at the Ministry and know exactly what I’m capable of.” Dae countered. “I’m not going to beg for it.”

Voldemort smiled at Dae’s forwardness. “I like you. Swear allegiance to me, and the position is yours.”

Dae took out his wand and swore allegiance as requested before replacing his wand. “If you will all excuse me, I have things I need to do.”

“You may go.” Voldemort dismissed him, before turning to Anna. “Take good care of my daughter.” He then walked over to where Seville was sitting staring into the fire, and pulled her to her feet

before embracing her again. "If you need me, go to Anna. She will let me know and I'll be there."

Seville hugged Voldemort before letting him go. "Thank you, Father."

Voldemort let his daughter go and turned to Harry. "Come here."

Harry stepped over to Voldemort, and had to steel himself to keep still as Voldemort placed a hand on his shoulder before apparating them both back into his rooms. While Harry was able to apparate out of Villa Laurifer from anywhere, he wasn't able to apparate directly into Voldemort's rooms.

Voldemort got straight to the point. "My daughter had an interesting tale to tell me, Sirius."

Sirius knew he was going to pay for his hasty words to Seville. "My Lord?"

"If you ever threaten my daughter again, Sirius, I won't be responsible for my actions." Voldemort snapped.

Sirius let out a small sigh of relief as he realized that Voldemort wasn't going to punish him. "I understand my Lord."

Voldemort knew exactly what Sirius was thinking. "Don't think I'm going to let this slip by because I'm not. I asked Harry to come back with me for two reasons. The first is to ask him to continue your son's training in his father's place."

Harry was thankful. "I'd be glad to my Lord."

Voldemort smiled benevolently at Harry. "And the second is to punish you."

Sirius knew that Harry wasn't going to go easy on him. "Yes, my Lord."

"Harry, take him out and show him what happens to those who dare to threaten my family." Voldemort ordered. "Please make sure he

doesn't die though." Voldemort looked at Sirius. "And you'll release him from his oath for the duration of your punishment, and there had better be no repercussions."

"Yes, my Lord." Sirius, like those he'd done this to before him, knew better than to argue and followed Harry out of the room.

Grimmauld Place

Sirius apparated directly into his bedroom. He didn't want to have to explain to Narcissa why he was covered in blood and had a broken arm as well as several holes in his legs. Harry had taken his time, and had systematically caused an injury before placing Sirius under the Cruciatus curse time and time again. Pulling open his medical bag, he first took a painkiller, letting out a sigh of relief as it began to work, before starting to heal himself. Once he'd patched himself up, he limped downstairs, where he found Orion asleep in Narcissa's arms.

Narcissa held a finger to her lips before casting a silencing spell around her nephew. "He came home a few hours ago. Siri, he was drunk."

Sirius wasn't entirely surprised. "I'm just glad he's home."

"You don't look so good yourself." Narcissa thought Sirius looked as if he was in pain. "Did something happen?"

"I tripped up over something; it's nothing I can't deal with." Sirius knew that Orion had only returned because he was afraid for his brother and girlfriend. "We can leave Orion here for tonight. I don't want to wake him."

Narcissa got up, gently supporting Orion's head before placing it onto a pillow. "I'll go sleep with the girls."

"Thanks, Narcy." Sirius hugged his cousin. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"It's nothing, Sirius." Narcissa headed towards the stairs. "I'll see you in the morning."

Sirius headed for his bedroom before closing and warding the door. Only then did he give into his grief at what he'd done.

Next Chapter: Everyone returns to Hogwarts; Harry continues to train the rebels as well as improving his own skills with Dae stepping in to help him; Unbeknown to Harry and Dae, there is a traitor in their midst.

This should be posted hopefully by the weekend.

Chapter 67: Betrayal

January 10th 1998

Harry walked into the Room and stood watching the others. It was the first meeting of that month and Blaise left off what he was doing to walk over to Harry. "Harry, I'm sorry about your Dad and Professor Black."

"Thank you." Harry responded brusquely. "We've got work to do, Blaise, so please get on with it."

Blaise walked back over to where he had been dueling with Draco. "I wish there was something I could do to help."

Draco lifted his wand. "There is, Blaise. Keep practicing so that eventually there won't be any Death Eaters left to kill anyone."

Harry strolled over to where Hermione was watching Seville tackle Galton Goyle. "Hermione."

Hermione's face lit up. "Harry, I thought you were going to be late."

"Anna cancelled my detention." Anna had declared that Harry had better things to do with his time than serving detention with his sisters.

"I can't say I'm too unhappy about that." Hermione threw up a privacy bubble. "How are you holding up?"

"I wish everyone would stop offering their condolences." Harry felt a bit mean about it. "I know they mean well, but it's driving me mad."

Hermione looked away as the door opened. "We'll talk about this later. I was going to introduce Dae to the others, but as you're here he's all yours."

A red-headed man entered the room and stood quietly for a moment as he contemplated the small groups. Dae had decided to use a disguise to catch those who knew him unawares. He also felt more

comfortable if none of the children realized that their Dark Arts teacher was also working against the Dark Lord.

Harry dropped the privacy bubble and headed over. "Luke, how good to see you."

The other children had by now stopped what they were doing, and watched as Harry shook the man's hand, before leading him forward. "Everyone, this is Luke Walker. He's going to be helping us."

"How do we know we can trust him?" Jamie eyed the man suspiciously.

"I was a friend of Remus'." Dae informed them.

"As if I'm going to trust someone like that." Jamie, who was still smarting over the death of his mother, scowled at the man.

Harry turned on Jamie. "I believe that this is a conversation best left for later, Jamie."

Jamie grabbed Harry by the arm and dragged him over to the corner before invoking a privacy bubble. "No, Harry. It's time we had this conversation now. If it wasn't for your bloody Dad, Mum would still be alive."

Harry knew that Jamie had been itching to have it out about Remus since they'd returned to school. "It's Sirius' fault that neither of them are still alive."

"Don't blame him for being upset. It was your lowlife Dad who couldn't keep it in his..." Jamie's words came to an abrupt end as Harry punched his brother in the face.

Harry leant over his brother. "Don't you dare ever talk about my Dad like that again. He loved Maman and would have done anything for her."

Jamie ignored Harry's warning, and scrambled angrily to his feet. "No he wouldn't. He let Anna live when he could have saved Mum."

“Anna had nothing to do with it, Jamie.” Harry pointed out. “Maman understood why Dad picked her.”

“How could she have understood?” Jamie snarled. “She wasn’t given much choice. Your Dad chose and he didn’t pick her.”

“He couldn’t, Jamie.” Harry couldn’t tell Jamie that Chloe wasn’t Remus’ daughter as he’d sworn to keep it secret. “He didn’t only have Anna to think of, he had Chloe.”

“So if he loved Mum so much, why was he shagging someone else?” Jamie pushed Harry in the chest.

“It’s complicated and none of your business why.” Harry pushed back at his brother. “And it’s beside the point now anyway.”

“No, it’s not.” Jamie screamed at Harry. “My Mum is dead because of your fucking Dad and she’s never coming back. Anna and her brat are still alive, with Anna lording it over everyone here, when it should have been Mum.” Jamie burst into tears. “I hate her.” He then stalked off out of the room.

Harry let him leave. Dae walked over and set up a similar bubble. “Problems?”

“He’s resentful of Dad picking Anna over Maman.” Harry ran a hand through his hair. “I’m just fucking fed up of it all.”

“Calm down.” Dae could tell that Harry was close to breaking. “You need to stop being so hard on yourself.”

Harry knew that Dae had a point. “I’m sorry. It’s just that I’m finding it a little difficult to cope at the moment.”

“Hopefully the Dark Lord will make his move soon, and this will all be over.” Dae knew that things would settle down then. “He’s already slowly infiltrating the Ministry with his own men.”

"I can't believe we're just going to stand by and let him." Harry had been surprised when Dae and Remus had filled him in on the Dark Lord's plan just before Christmas.

"We've got a pretty good idea of who his men are, and they're being watched at all times." Dae received reports on a daily basis as he was able to slip out undetected from the school thanks to his small animagus form. "We need the Dark Lord to believe he'll succeed. When we find out that he's ready to take action, then we'll step in and take out his operatives before they get a chance to make their move."

Harry was still concerned that Dae was being overconfident. "I just hope that things go as planned."

"I'm sure they will." Dae dropped the bubble, and walked back over to where the other children were waiting for them. "I think we're going to have a little demonstration. I'm going to start with each of you, working my way up to Harry."

Blaise smirked. "Harry will wipe the floor with you."

Dae knew that Blaise had seen Harry's demonstrations at Villa Laurifer. "I might surprise you."

Blaise disagreed. "I've seen Harry in action; he's very good."

"I'm not infallible, Blaise." Harry told the Slytherin. "I challenged Amicus to a duel recently and he wiped the floor with me." Even though Harry had told everyone that Lily and Remus had been killed by a Death Eater, he hadn't gone into detail of how or who had done it.

"I still think you'll beat this guy. He doesn't exactly look tough." Blaise looked Dae over.

Dae had deliberately assumed an unpretentious appearance. His curly red hair and glasses gave him a scholarly air, and his slight frame made him look as if a puff of wind would blow him away. "Perhaps you'd like to go first."

Pulling out his wand, Blaise stepped into the center of the room and bowed to Dae. Twenty seconds later he was flat on his back, his wand being held by Dae. "How did you do that?"

Dae merely smiled and passed Blaise his wand back. "Let's get on with this."

One by one the children stepped forward, all ending up like Blaise. Only Dudley and Hermione lasted longer than the others.

Harry passed Dae a glass of water. "Perhaps you'd like a few minutes."

"Thank you." Dae gratefully took the water and drank it before shaking out his arm. "I think we might as well get on with this."

Blaise was no longer so sure about Harry's chances. He'd never seen anyone move so fluidly before, except for Amicus.

Harry bowed before Dae. "I'm ready."

Dae fired off three spells, one after the other, but Harry was ready and dispersed them easily enough, while responding with a stunning spell.

Dae knew that Harry was holding back. "Don't hold back on my account; anything goes."

Harry didn't need telling twice. "Reducto."

Dae hurriedly threw up a shield before sending his favorite cutting spell at Harry, who ducked. "Just to warn you, I'm not going to hold back either."

"Be my guest." Harry dropped and rolled over as a bloodletting curse barely missed him.

Dae smiled and used several first year spells to lull Harry into a false sense of security. Harry wondered what Dae was playing at. He soon

found out as Dae summoned a chest that Harry hadn't noticed from the far side of the room. The chest opened to reveal a Dementor.

Hermione shivered at the sight of the Dementor. She knew that it was only a boggart but it still sent shivers down her spine.

Harry was completely thrown as the Dementor came at him. Moving his concentration away from Dae, he invoked his patronus before realizing too late that it was only a boggart. By then, Dae had stepped in and using another first year spell, petrified Harry before walking over and removing Harry's wand from its holster and releasing him. Hermione dealt with the boggart to the relief of the other children in the room.

Harry shook Dae's hand. "I wasn't expecting that."

"I know." Dae turned round to the other children. "As Mr. Zabini pointed out, Harry is good but everyone has their weakness. I just happened to be aware of Harry's, and used it."

"But you must have set this up before you came here." Luna had easily deduced that the man had decided on his tactics long before he'd taken Harry on.

"And some of the situations you might walk into may well involve such a preconceived idea." Dae pointed out. "Just because you're good, doesn't mean that you might not come across something you don't expect."

Harry stood next to Dae. "Luke could have beaten me without the boggart. Some of the spells he was sending at me were pretty powerful and I really had to fight to keep my shield up."

"But most of them were only first year spells, and unlikely to do you any harm." Anna, who'd been bested by Dae in less than ten seconds, argued.

"It doesn't matter what level the spells were, Anna." Harry knew that Anna wasn't getting the point. "If a tickling spell had gotten through, it

might have been enough to catch me off guard, opening me up to a more damaging spell. I've tried to tell you this time and time again."

Anna fell silent. She hadn't really seen the point of using first year spells until now.

Dae ordered the children into groups based on how they'd fared with him. He then proceeded to put them through their paces.

February 7th 1998 – Villa Laurifer

Voldemort looked up from his chess game as a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

Jamie pushed open the door and bowed. "My Lord."

Voldemort turned to his chess partner. "Aditi, that will be all."

Aditi stood up and bowed. "My Lord."

Jamie politely nodded at the girl as she walked by before closing the door. "You called, my Lord."

"You can finish up Aditi's game." Voldemort indicated that Jamie should down opposite him. "I wanted to hear how you thought things were progressing at Hogwarts."

Jamie quickly scanned the board before making a move. "The group I mentioned is continuing to train to attack you."

"And how are they faring?" Voldemort moved his queen to take Jamie's bishop.

"They're getting better but they're nowhere near good enough yet." Jamie frowned as he contemplated his next move.

Voldemort hid his annoyance as Jamie took his knight. "How is Anna Lupin doing as Headmistress?"

Jamie grimaced at the mention of Anna's name. "She's almost as well liked as Lupin was."

"How is Venant doing?" Voldemort took Jamie's second and final bishop. "Check."

Jamie hid his smile as Voldemort fell for his ploy, and he maneuvered his queen into position. "He's an excellent Dark Arts teacher."

"I thought that would be the case. Even though I know he headed a department in the Ministry, I have to be honest and say that I have no idea what it is he did there or what his department did. The records show that he had something to do with training but I don't believe it." Voldemort castled, outmaneuvering Jamie. "I'd like for you to try and find out if you can."

"You do know that he was seeing Anna Lupin for a while don't you?" Jamie rethought his strategy and repositioned his queen. "Check."

"But she still ended up marrying Remus, so I doubt there's anything between them now." Voldemort pointed out as he avoided losing his last bishop. "Or is there something you know and I don't?"

Jamie shook his head as he moved his knight to check Voldemort's king. "Check. Her main focus seems to be on Chloe and Seville as well as the school. I doubt she's even thinking about anything else, particularly as her husband only died three months ago."

Voldemort was glad that Anna still appeared to be caring for his daughter. "Are you still dating Seville?"

"Yes." Jamie adored his girlfriend. "I was a bit worried she might have taken a liking to Harry but she said that she only sees him as a brother."

"I think Harry has other priorities right now. I know he's still upset with Sirius for killing his parents, and I have a feeling that Harry will eventually end up clashing with Sirius again. However this time I

doubt Sirius will let him walk away unscathed.” Voldemort knocked over his king as he realized that he couldn’t win. “I cede.”

Jamie hid his delight at winning. “Will you let Dad kill him?”

Voldemort shook his head. “No. Harry is more powerful than even he realizes; I don’t want that wasted when it could be put to good use for my benefit.”

Jamie watched as Voldemort reset the chessboard. “What happens if Harry kills Dad?”

“I doubt Harry will be able to do that.” Voldemort was supremely confident in Sirius’ abilities. He made his first move in the new game and indicated that Jamie should make one of his own.

“Mum got past his defenses that once.” Jamie’s face fell a little as he thought about Lily.

“That’s because Sirius didn’t want to hurt her.” Voldemort could see that Jamie was still hurting about his mother. “Jamie, Sirius would have done anything for your mother; even defy me I believe. Finding out about her and Remus was devastating for him.”

“I know.” Jamie and Sirius had sat and talked for hours in the aftermath of what had happened; Sirius being truthful with Jamie as to what he’d done. “Dad was absolutely gutted. I think he wishes he’d just killed Lupin.”

“You’re probably right.” Voldemort had also talked to Sirius. “But to be honest Lily was a weakness for him; something he’s better off without.”

“He should have just divorced her.” Jamie had been heartbroken after learning the truth behind Lily’s death.

“Sirius is like me in some respects; I punished a former lover of mine for doing the very same thing.” Voldemort moved his knight into position. “I was a little more graphic about it though.”

Jamie winced. "I'm glad Dad didn't go too far."

"Sirius could so easily have done so. In fact I was a little surprised to find out he didn't." Voldemort hid his satisfaction as Jamie made a wrong move. "How are things between you and Harry?"

"Strained." Jamie admitted as he watched Voldemort slide his queen across the board to take his pawn. "I blew up at him and blamed Lupin for everything. Harry actually hit me."

"You might want to be careful, Jamie." Voldemort knew that he'd won as Jamie castled to save his king. "Harry is very powerful. Seville told me he blew out all of the windows in the house when Sirius forced Remus to kill himself. Don't push him too far; he's far more powerful than you."

Jamie scowled as he was reminded of his brother's superior power. "I know that already. I've never been able to beat him in a duel yet. He's always several moves ahead of me."

Voldemort doubted that Jamie would ever beat his brother, unless he got very lucky. "Seville said that Orion is shaping up well."

Jamie smiled as he thought of his brother. "He's doing great, but he's still refusing to talk to Dad, even though I've tried several times."

"Can he beat you in a duel yet?" Voldemort couldn't resist goading Jamie a little.

"Yes." Jamie reluctantly admitted. "He seems to have some sort of knack for it."

"I think it's a Black family trait, Jamie." Voldemort moved his queen. "Checkmate."

Jamie gasped. "How did you do that?"

"Years of practice." Voldemort stood up and vanished the board. "You did well in the first game but that was because Aditi is even better than I am, and she had already primed the board for you."

Jamie hated that his victory was tainted. "I think I need more practice."

Voldemort indicated that they should sit down in front of the fire. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Thank you, I would, my Lord." Jamie realized he hadn't addressed Voldemort correctly for the entirety of the board game.

A house-elf appeared with scotch for Voldemort and a beer for Jamie. Jamie knew that Anna would have his hide if she found out that he was drinking but it made him feel more grown-up. "When do you want me to start passing on the false information about the Ministry to the group?"

"Not yet." Voldemort swirled his scotch and ice-cubes around the glass before taking a mouthful. "I've now infiltrated almost all of the Ministry at every level. Another few months and I'll be ready to make my move."

Jamie knew that Remus had been the person that had suggested that Voldemort use a more subtle approach than a simple full frontal attack. "Lupin was a good strategist if nothing else."

"Is it he who taught you to play chess?" Voldemort was curious.

"No, an ex-friend, Ronald Prewett." Jamie knew that Ron wouldn't have fallen for the same ploy he'd done.

"He's Ginevra's brother, isn't he?" Voldemort had an excellent memory and knew the names of all the Death Eaters under his aegis.

"Yes, but we couldn't get him to join of his own free will." Jamie and Ginny had both initially tried to talk Ron around. "A pity as he's a pureblood."

"I'm sure he'll change his mind unless of course he wants to die on his leaving day." Voldemort had decided to mark each house over the space of a week at a series of meetings.

“Well it will be his loss.” Jamie pushed thoughts of Ron aside as a knock sounded at the door and Jamie slipped his mask back on, only to remove it again as Sirius came in.

Sirius bowed to Voldemort before removing his mask. “My Lord.”

“I was just discussing with your son how things are progressing at Hogwarts.” Voldemort informed Sirius as he sat down and took the scotch the house-elf that appeared offered.

“I’ve been there a couple of times myself.” Sirius had checked to see how things were going since Anna had taken over as headmistress. “Lupin’s widow seems to be doing an adequate job.”

“Is she still not speaking to you?” Voldemort knew that Anna hated Sirius.

Sirius smirked. “As if I care. As long as she does her job and toes the line, then that’s all that matters. I’m sure she’ll find someone to take Lupin’s place in her bed eventually.”

Jamie thought Sirius was being a little callous but didn’t dare say anything. Voldemort, however, didn’t have any such reservations. “And you, Sirius? Have you found someone to take Lily’s place?”

Sirius’ face became closed; the only indication that he’d found the question offensive. “No, my Lord. I doubt that I ever will.”

“I’m sure Callide would be happy to help you out.” Voldemort knew Lucius’ wife had a thing for Sirius.

“She’s already made that patently clear.” Sirius had run into Lucius’ wife on his way in. “I thought you and she were still...?”

Voldemort shook his head. “That is long over.”

Jamie thought about the girl he’d seen leaving. “Are you and Aditi dating, my Lord?”

Voldemort knew that Jamie would assume that. “No. Aditi is a very pretty girl but our relationship is purely cerebral. My tastes run in a different direction.”

Jamie fell silent as Voldemort and Sirius began to discuss Orion. “What are you going to do about Orion?”

“He’ll come round.” Sirius was confident that Orion would eventually soften towards him. “Once he’s been hurt by a woman, he’ll understand why I did what I did. I don’t foresee any major problems with him.”

“If there is, then Jamie will be taking care of it.” Voldemort wasn’t going to let sentiment get in the way again as it had with Lily. “We don’t need a repeat performance of your wife.”

“I agree.” Sirius didn’t want Orion hurt but he knew that he couldn’t push Voldemort on the matter, particularly after Lily’s spectacular defection.

Jamie couldn’t believe that he might have to someday deal with his brother. “But Orion’s my brother; you can’t expect me to kill him.”

Voldemort stood up. “I’ll let you explain to your son the way of things.”

Jamie realized that they were being dismissed and stood up and bowed. “If I may take my leave?”

“You may. Sirius.” Voldemort smiled at his friend. “I’ll see you both tomorrow for Orion’s induction.”

“My Lord.” Father and son replaced their masks before exiting the room.

“Come with me.” Sirius ordered.

Jamie followed his Dad into his rooms before taking off his mask again. “What’s up?”

“Jamie, if you want to play hardball in the Dark Lord’s ranks, then you’ve got to be willing to do whatever it takes.” Sirius sighed. “I had to kill my own brother.”

Jamie already knew this but couldn’t tell Sirius that Harry had told him, having been sworn to secrecy. “Why?”

“Because he was a traitor to our Master.” Sirius pulled out a memory and placed it into a pensieve he removed from a cupboard. “This is the memory.”

Jamie, who’d already seen it, dutifully entered the pensieve before coming out a short time later. “I’m sorry you had to do that.”

“So am I.” Sirius stared at Jamie. “We all have to make sacrifices if we want to get ahead.”

“I understand.” Jamie picked up his mask. “I’d better be getting back to school.”

“Is there anything else you can tell me about this group that is planning to attack our Master?” Sirius knew that Jamie had been sworn to secrecy.

“I’m sorry, Dad but there’s nothing else I can tell you except that it exists.” That had been the only loophole in the oath he’d sworn that Jamie had been able to make use of. “It’s up to you to find out who’s a part of it as I can’t tell you, nor can I tell you where and when we meet.” Jamie knew that Sirius would never be able to find out as he had no idea of who to follow except for him. “I can’t even lead you there as it would be breaking my oath.”

“Leave it with me.” Sirius ruffled Jamie’s hair. “You’d best get back. It’s getting late.”

“I’ll see you soon, Dad.” Jamie hugged Sirius and replaced his mask. “Can I apparate from here?”

“You may.” Sirius let Jamie leave from his room, before replacing his own mask and heading back down to Voldemort’s rooms. He had an idea.

The next night

Orion could feel himself shaking as he sat with Harry in Anna’s office. “Harry, I’m scared.”

“I know.” Harry was a little frightened for his brother himself. “Just keep calm and everything will be alright.”

“What if I have to kill someone like you and Jamie did?” Orion struggled to hold back his tears at thought of having to really kill someone.

“You know you’re capable of it.” Harry and Dae had both put Orion through exactly the same as he’d gone through. The only difference was that Orion had easily mastered the killing curse, to his own disgust.

“But killing an animal is one thing; a human being is something totally different.” Orion wiped his hands down his trousers.

“I know that.” Harry checked the time. “Jamie should have been here by now.”

Jamie burst through the door. “Sorry I’m late.”

“We need to go.” Harry smiled encouragingly at Orion. “Put on your mask, and do exactly as you’re told.”

The three boys apparated to the main arrival point in Villa Laurifer as directed where they found Sirius waiting for them. “Sidus, you will come with me.”

Having little choice, Orion followed his Dad as he led him into the ballroom and off into a side room where he found a woman he’d only heard about, waiting. “Hello, Orion.”

"You can remove your mask." Sirius didn't remove his own. "This is your Aunt Bella."

"Hello." Orion wondered why Sirius had chosen now to introduce them.

"You look so much your father." Bella had agreed to speak to Orion about his mother. "I'll deal with him now."

Orion hid his fear, and wondered how she was going to deal with him. Sirius left. "What do you want?"

"Only to talk to you." Bella looked at Orion. "Sirius is going through a tough time at the moment."

"I don't care." Orion's face became stubborn. "He deserves everything he gets."

"Do you know that this was the second time that Remus did something like that to him?" Bella watched shock flitter across Orion's face. "Remus slept with Sirius' fiancée when they had just left school. Sirius let him live that time. However he killed his fiancée."

Orion remembered the final conversation between his Dad and Remus. "Eleanor?"

"Yes." Bella had hated the girl. "The only difference is that your Dad didn't really love her like he loved Lily."

"Dad didn't love Mum. If he had, she'd still be here." Orion snapped.

"Your Mum betrayed him, Orion." Bella pointed out. "As did Remus. Remus was worse as he was jealous that Sirius had something he didn't."

Orion was convinced that Bella was wrong. "Mum said she was loved Uncle Remus and he said he loved her."

“But he didn’t love her enough to give up his wife for her, did he?” Bella knew how to get to someone; she’d been skilled at weaving doubt into the minds of those she’d tortured before killing them.

Orion had thought that but remembered what his Mum had said. “Anna was an innocent party; Mum knew that.”

“How do you know she wasn’t just saying that to make it easier on you?” Bella smiled softly at the boy. “A mother will do anything for their children; believe me I know.”

Orion could feel doubt creeping in. “I don’t want to talk about this anymore.”

Bella hid her smile. “Just promise me you’ll think about talking to Sirius.”

“Okay.” Orion just wanted Bella to leave him alone.

Bella picked up his mask. “You’re going to need this. It’s time.”

Orion put on his mask and followed Bella out. He felt his heart start to race as he saw the large group of Death Eaters standing around. He took comfort from the fact that Harry and Jamie were both standing a few feet away.

Voldemort turned. “Sidus, come here.” Voldemort turned to the assembled group. “I have a new recruit; he is called Sidus. He was originally Praeses’ protégé but unfortunately Praeses is no longer with us.” Voldemort waited as shockwaves reverberated around the room at his news. He hadn’t told any of the lower ranking Death Eaters that Remus had been killed three months earlier. “Sidus will eventually be taking his place. Alumno, come forward.”

Harry stepped forward at Voldemort’s command. “Yes, my Lord?”

“Sidus will be your protégé from now on.” Voldemort turned to the others. “You may all bear witness to Sidus’ induction.”

Harry felt his heart sink as he realized what Voldemort expected him to do, and judging from the way Orion stiffened, Harry guessed that Orion had deduced it as well.

Voldemort looked at Orion. "Kneel and swear allegiance to Alumno."

Orion did as he was told, his voice shaking slightly. Voldemort looked at Harry. "He is yours to mark."

Harry was eternally grateful to Dae for teaching him how to temper his spells. "Your left arm."

Orion rolled up his sleeve and wished he'd listened to Lily about delaying taking the Mark. Having to go through the torture once had been bad enough. This time he wasn't going to have the same support as before.

Harry swiftly incanted the spell, pushing only a minimal amount of power into it. Even so, it was enough to make Orion scream out loud. Harry just hoped his brother would be able to stand afterwards.

Orion climbed unsteadily to his feet when told to do so, before turning to face the crowd. Voldemort looked satisfied and then went over a few things he wanted those assembled to know before dismissing everyone.

Harry started to follow Orion out. Jamie hesitated. "I'll see you a little later. There's something I need from my rooms."

Harry didn't think any of it and hurried out with Orion. Jamie headed upstairs and into his Dad's rooms. "Why didn't Lord Voldemort give Orion to you?"

"Because Harry was his sponsor. Rules are rules." Sirius knew that Jamie was indignant on his behalf. "Was that all you wanted?"

"No. I wanted to let you know that I saw Venant leave Hogwarts' grounds yesterday." Jamie began, only for Sirius to interrupt him.

“No-one’s supposed to leave unless it’s a Hogsmeade weekend.” Sirius wondered why Venant would disobey the rules.

“That’s not all.” Jamie knew that the information he had might be of use to Sirius. “He’s an animagus.”

“How did you find out?” Sirius was surprised that Venant would be so open about it.

“I was flying over the school when I spotted him changing in the middle of some bushes.” Jamie had managed to master his animagus form a few months earlier.

“And what is he?” Sirius decided to have a drink while Jamie got to the point.

“A small rodent.” Jamie informed him.

“What kind of rodent?” Sirius decided he’d visit the school and use his own animagus form to track where Venant was going.

“A cute little black hamster.” Jamie grinned, not noticing how white Sirius had gone. “Can you believe it?”

“Are you sure?” Sirius snapped out.

Jamie finally noticed Sirius’ demeanor. “Definitely.”

“Fuck.” Sirius slammed his drink down. “Come with me.”

Jamie slipped on his mask and followed Sirius down to Voldemort’s rooms where they were bidden enter.

Sirius bowed and pulled off his mask. “I think we have a problem, my Lord.”

“What now?” Voldemort was a little surprised to see that Sirius actually looked agitated.

“I believe my brother is still alive.” Sirius informed him.

Jamie gasped as he realized what Sirius was saying. Voldemort frowned. "But you killed him."

"Jamie saw Venant leaving the school. His animagus is a black hamster as was Regulus'." Sirius was finding it hard to believe that Venant might be Regulus. "I don't believe it's a coincidence."

Voldemort wasn't happy. "I think you should check things out. Both of you may go."

Sirius and Jamie bowed and left the room. Sirius pushed open the doors to his rooms. "I'm going to be visiting Hogwarts tomorrow. You'll assume your animagus form and keep an eye out for Venant. I'll be waiting just inside the Forbidden Forest."

Jamie nodded. "I'll see you then."

"You'd best get back. The wards have been changed to allow you to apparate from here from now on." Sirius informed. "Speak of this to no-one; not even Harry."

"I won't." Jamie disappeared, leaving Sirius alone.

Hogwarts

Harry led Orion to Anna's private quarters; unknowingly echoing Sirius' own words. "Anna, we have a problem."

Orion pulled off his mask and held out his arm. "Harry had to mark me."

"Dammit." Anna hurried over to the potions cabinet and pulled out a potion. "Take this. I'll be back shortly."

Harry sat with his brother until he heard the fireplace in Anna's office come to life. He hurried into Anna's office to find Jamie standing there. "You took your time."

"I thought I'd left my cloak in my rooms but I couldn't find it." Jamie didn't meet Harry's eyes. "I'm off to bed."

Harry frowned as Jamie left the room. Walking back into Anna's sitting room, he pulled a face at Orion's arm. "Sorry, I was a little panicked and it was the first place I thought to put it. Unfortunately I don't know how to move it."

"I'm not blaming you." Orion could see that Harry was upset.

"There is something I can do though." Harry laid a hand on Orion's arm. "I, Harry Remus Lupin-Potter hereby free you from your oath of allegiance to me."

Orion smiled gratefully at Harry just as Anna stepped into the room, Dae right behind her. Dae knelt down. "Orion, I need you to swear an oath that you won't reveal what we're about to show you."

Orion was curious but agreed. "I swear to keep secret whatever it is you're going to show me."

"Come with us." Dae led the way to the second floor and into the girls' toilet.

Harry hissed at the sink. "Open. Stairs."

Orion gaped as the sink slid away. He'd not seen Harry's memory of the Chamber and hurriedly followed Anna and Dae down the stairs. Harry stood at the top of the staircase, and hissed again. "Close."

Orion wondered what he was going to be shown. Harry took the lead again, opening the large circular door. As the door slid open, Orion was greeted by the sight of a large well-lit room. Music was coming from up ahead.

Harry led the way, Orion slowly following, as he stared up at the large columns that supported the roof. As they made their way into the large opening at the back of the cavern, Orion's mouth fell open. "Mum?"

Next Chapter: I'm keeping these shorter so I can post quicker. Hope to post the next one by Saturday, if not sooner.

Chapter 68: Discovery

January 10th 1998

Lily held out her arms and Orion ran into them sobbing. "Mum."

"It's me, baby." Lily rocked him; she'd desperately missed her children.

"What's happened?" Remus knew that something must have occurred for Dae to allow Orion down there.

"Harry had to mark Orion this evening." Dae quickly explained.

"Mum, why didn't you tell me?" Orion still could hardly believe that she was alive as he lifted his tearstained face to look at her.

"Because your reaction had to seem genuine, Orion." Lily led Orion over to a sofa which looked out of the place in the large room.

"I could have kept it a secret." Orion didn't want to let Lily go. He turned to Harry. "You should have trusted me."

"Don't blame Harry." Remus interrupted his nephew. "He wanted to tell all of you but Lily and I overrode his protests."

Orion's face softened. "Thanks Harry."

"I hated keeping it from you." Harry sat down on the other side of Lily. "But it's been a huge strain for me knowing that Maman and Dad are still alive and I haven't been able to tell anyone. They didn't want to put you under that sort of pressure."

Orion knew that Harry hadn't been himself and had been terribly distracted; at least now he knew why. "I'm just glad that you're alright."

"You're going to find it more difficult than you think to keep this a secret." Dae just hoped that Orion wouldn't crack under the strain.

Orion looked at Remus. "You used Harry's wand, didn't you?"

"Yes. It was only providence that you damaged my wand when we were dueling." Remus had never been so relieved to have sustained wand damage.

"What exactly happened?" Orion wanted to know how his Uncle and mother had found themselves living in the Chamber.

December 30th 1997

Remus groaned and opened his eyes to find Harry bending down over him. "I'm glad you figured it out."

"I didn't." Harry looked over at Anna. "Anna did."

"How?" Remus sat up and saw Lily waking up as well.

"Body heat." Anna smiled. "I could feel it radiating off you when I came in to pay my last respects. As well as the fact that there was no rigor mortis."

Remus was relieved that Anna had noticed. "I thought someone would have worked out that I'd used Harry's wand."

"No-one was thinking clearly." Hermione was annoyed that she hadn't thought of it.

"I'm not surprised." Remus swung his legs off the bed. "I think I'd like to get a shower and get changed, and then someone can fill me on what happened."

Lily and Remus returned to the bedroom after showering and changing, and Harry explained what had happened. "The upside of everything is that I got to punish Sirius."

"And the downside?" Lily asked.

"That I enjoyed it." Harry admitted. "I'm still worried about slipping."

"I'd have enjoyed it as well." Remus knew that he would been far crueler than Harry had been. "So I shouldn't worry about that too much."

"Now the big issue is what we're going to do with you two." Dae, who had stayed quiet while Harry talked, brought up the problem that was at the back of everyone's minds. "I'd like you somewhere close where we can contact you." Dae grinned at Remus. "I know Anna volunteered me for the Dark Arts position and I'm great at using them but teaching is a different matter. I could at least be able to pick your brains if you were close by."

Harry snapped his fingers. "How about the Chamber? No-one's likely to go down there, not even the Dark Lord."

"And if he does?" Lily was a little uncomfortable about using the area.

"You can portkey out." Harry knew that the room wasn't warded against outward travel. "If he wonders why it's a little cozy I'll say I was entertaining."

Lily looked at Remus. "It might work. At least I'd be close to the children even if I can't see them."

"Do you think Papa could visit occasionally?" Hermione missed her parents terribly and yearned to see them more often.

"I don't see why not." Harry could have kicked himself for not having thought of it sooner. "I've got another question though. What about your bodies?"

"Leave that to me; I'll sort something out." Dae didn't elaborate on how he planned to do this.

Not really caring to know, Harry didn't ask Dae any questions. "Thanks."

Remus looked around his room. "I guess I'd best take only a few basic things. I don't want Dudley and the others wondering why half of my things have gone missing."

"I'll get you some extra clothing." Dae offered. "And some for you as well Lily."

"We'll need books as well." Lily thought for a moment. "We can make a list of anything else we might need as we go along."

"I can arrange for bedding to be moved from the Potter Estate." Harry offered. "I'd trust French with my life so I think if we ask him and Pasha to deal with that."

"Good idea." Dae had one final question. "Are you going to tell the others?"

Remus shook his head. "I don't think it's a good idea. The more people who know, the more likely someone will let something slip. It's going to be hard for enough for you four to keep the secret."

"Dad, you can't just leave them thinking you're dead." Harry argued. "It was awful when I thought I'd never speak to you again."

"Harry, I'm sorry but that's the way it has to be." Remus knew how badly it would hurt his children when they found out but he had everyone's safety to think about. "If Sirius was to find out that he'd been tricked, it would endanger not only me and Lily but everyone else in the family. I need your word that you won't tell them."

Harry understood Remus' reasoning but still thought he was wrong. "I don't agree but I promise that I won't reveal that you and Maman survived without your permission."

"Thank you." Lily hugged her son. "I'm not happy about it either but Remus has a point."

Over the next few hours, Lily and Remus were moved to school; Lily travelling in her animagus form wrapped around Remus' neck. No-one took any notice of the white-masked Death Eater who arrived at the school alone; those children who hadn't gone home for the holidays were used to seeing the odd Death Eater walking around.

Hermione had made her way to the Chamber entrance and opened it so that Remus and Lily could go down before she sealed it up again.

Harry had remained at home, refusing to stay with Nia and Grim. He knew that he couldn't keep up the pretence in such close contact with his siblings and he had therefore chosen to stay at Grimmauld Square until the funerals on January 2nd. Dae had been as good as his word and had dealt with the body issue. Severus had brewed the same variation of polyjuice he'd intended to use on Pettigrew before Sirius had killed him, and Dae had used this before sending Lily's 'body' back home.

Present Time

"I'm still not talking to Sirius." Orion told his mother as they chatted. "He even had Bellatrix try to convince me that it was all Uncle Remus' fault, and not Sirius'."

"Orion, I do feel as if it was my fault." Remus knew that Bella had had some legitimacy when she'd tried to tell Orion that. "If I had never marked Lily, Sirius wouldn't have found out."

"What do you mean by marked?" Orion remembered Sirius snarling something about Lily wearing Remus' mark but he'd forgotten about the remark until then.

Lily blushed. "Erm..."

Harry smiled. "Let me." He then drew Orion to one side. "When a werewolf marks his mate, he usually leaves a bite mark on her."

"Why?" Orion was interested to know.

"To show that she belongs to him." Harry knew that Orion was going to be embarrassed when he told him the next part. "It happens when they're mating."

Orion went bright red. "Oh."

“Exactly.” Harry grinned. “Now you know why Maman wasn’t in a hurry to tell you.”

“I half wished I hadn’t asked.” Orion walked back to his mother and Remus. Remus was wearing a slightly amused look. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Remus scowled at Dae, who was doing his best not to laugh. “I’d shut up if I was you, unless you want me sharing your animagus form with the rest of the group here.”

Dae sobered up. “That’s hardly fair.”

Remus laughed. “Who said I’ve got to play fair; I’m dead.”

“You might be dead but we need your help with something.” Dae became serious again. “When Harry marked Orion he did it on his left arm, and neither of us know how to move it.”

“What were you thinking?” Remus couldn’t believe that Harry had done something so stupid.

“I wasn’t exactly thinking, Dad.” Harry defended his actions. “I was kind of in the midst of panicking. I had to do it in front of everyone.”

Remus looked at the mark on Orion’s arm. “You might want to wait for a day or so because moving it hurts more than getting the original mark.”

“Crap.” Orion wasn’t looking forward to it. “I was hoping that wouldn’t be the case.”

“I’ll remove every link except for the apparition and summoning parts; perhaps it might hurt less then.” Lily suggested.

Remus shook his head. “I don’t know how it would affect it. I’m afraid Orion is going to have to grin and bear it.”

“I doubt I’m going to be doing much grinning.” Orion drily informed his Uncle. “Can I stay here tonight?”

Lily looked hopefully at Remus who nodded. "We'd love to have you stay."

Orion beamed at Harry. "Will you come get me in the morning?"

"Of course. I'll let your roommates know that you're staying with me for tonight." Harry, Dae and Anna all got up and left, leaving Remus and Lily alone with Orion. Harry had a feeling that Orion wouldn't be getting much sleep.

14th January 1998

After several abortive evenings looking for Dae, Jamie finally spotted his prey. He quickly circled before landing by Sirius and changing. "He's on the far side of this clearing heading North."

"Thanks." Sirius transformed and loped off; Jamie tracking his progress overhead. Sirius soon picked up on the hamster's trail; it definitely smelt familiar. Suddenly a large black shape loomed out of nowhere and plucked the hamster from the ground. Sirius assumed human form again and Jamie did the same. "Where the hell did that come from?"

Jamie watched as the large bird flew off and disappeared into the night. "I've seen a large eagle around here a couple of times but I've not paid it much attention to be honest; we see them all the time."

"So if that hamster was Venant, he's either got an animagus friend or he's going to be surprising that eagle very soon." Sirius pulled out the Map. "We'll soon find out."

Jamie and Sirius waited. Suddenly two names appeared on the Map in Dae's room. "Well, well." Sirius looked at the names. "Leonardo and Felix Flamel. Now I wonder who they might be."

Sirius slid on his mask. "Go back to your dorm. I'll be in touch."

"Goodnight Dad." Jamie transformed and headed back towards the school. He'd left a window open in the library so he knew that he'd be able to get back in.

Sirius stalked toward the school. Entering the school he went to head up to Dae's rooms only to change his mind and set out toward the dungeons.

Hermione was just starting to mark the Charms papers she had assigned for the first years' homework when a knock sounded at the door. She was finding it difficult to manage both Charms and Potions but she was determined to keep it up, not wanting to give Voldemort and Sirius the satisfaction of knowing that she was struggling to cope.

Opening the door Hermione found Amicus leaning against her doorpost. "What the hell do you want?" Knowing that Sirius couldn't hurt her, Hermione didn't bother to be polite.

"I'd like a word with you." Sirius pushed past Hermione and entered the room; taking his mask off once inside. He looked down at the pile of homework papers Hermione had stacked on the desk. "So how's the charms position working out for you?"

"You haven't come all the way down here to talk to me about a teaching position, so why don't you get to the point." Hermione didn't have time for Sirius' forestalling.

Sirius sat down on the sofa. "I want you to tell me all about your fiancé."

"There's nothing to tell." Hermione hated the way that Sirius made himself at home.

"But I think there is." Sirius wasn't leaving until he found out what he wanted to know.

"Such as?" Hermione remained standing.

"How about why he's wandering the school grounds this late at night?" Sirius looked expectantly at Hermione.

"I don't know." Hermione pointed to the pile of papers. "As you can see I've better things to do than to keep track of Dae's every movement."

Sirius got up. "Or what his animagus form is?"

"I don't know that either." Hermione didn't.

"I find it difficult to believe that you don't know the answer to either question." Sirius felt stymied by the fact that he couldn't use force to get his answers. "So let's start with the first question again."

"I've already told you, I really don't know." Hermione scowled at him.

"Perhaps he's seeing someone else." Sirius suggested. "Rumor has it that he was seeing Anna Lupin for a time."

Hermione hid her surprise that Sirius knew about that. "So what?"

"What's the matter, Snape?" Sirius taunted. "Not enough woman for him?"

"Or perhaps I prefer not to flaunt it around until I'm married." Hermione snapped back at him.

"I can't argue with that." Sirius was about to try a different tactic when another knock sounded at the door. Sirius slipped his mask on. "Answer it."

Dae smiled brightly as Hermione opened the door to him. "Hello darling. I thought I'd drop by and see if you needed anything."

Hermione realized that somehow Dae knew that Sirius was there. "That's so thoughtful of you. Come in."

Dae stepped into the room to see Sirius fixing himself a drink from the bar at the side of the room. "Amicus."

“Venant.” Sirius turned round to face Dae; his mask had changed to the three-quarter version he favored when wishing to drink in front of others. “Perhaps you’d care to join me.”

“No thank you.” Dae moved to stand next to Hermione, slipping his arm around her waist. “I only came down to spend some time with my fiancée.”

“That’s odd because I could have sworn I saw you heading outside less than fifteen minutes ago.” Sirius took a mouthful of the scotch. “Now why don’t you tell me the truth?”

“So I took a stroll and got some fresh air. It’s not a crime.” Dae slipped both arms around Hermione and pulled her against him. “I’d rather visit Hermione when I’m feeling awake.”

“I’ve heard that it’s not exactly Snape’s company you prefer.” Sirius sat back down on the sofa. “I’ve heard that it was once Anna Lupin who piqued your interest.”

Dae shrugged. “A minor indiscretion for which Hermione has long forgiven me.”

“Whatever.” Sirius wasn’t really interested in who Dae had been sleeping with. He’d only mentioned Anna to hurt Hermione. “I’d like to get back to that stroll of yours. Interesting animagus form you have.”

Dae wasn’t surprised by Sirius’ comment. “So what?”

“I know someone who used to have the very same form.” Sirius took another mouthful of the scotch. “A Death Eater by the name of Regulus Black.”

“And?” Dae didn’t let Sirius know that he was a little alarmed by Sirius’ comment.

“He’s supposed to be dead.” Sirius stood up. “I’d like to see your left arm.”

Dae didn't move. "I've already told your Master that I wouldn't take his Mark, so you won't find anything."

Sirius thought differently. "Do it."

Dae released Hermione and rolled up his sleeve. "See. There's nothing there. Now what?"

Sirius pulled out his wand making Hermione start. "We'll see." Sirius then proceeded to cast every revealing spell he knew on Dae's arm including a few that were decidedly dark and pretty painful. After exhausting his repertoire, Sirius put his wand away. "I must have been mistaken but I still know you're up to something, Venant."

"Everyone's up to something, Amicus." Dae rolled down his sleeve. "Now if you don't mind, I'd like to spend a nice evening with my fiancée."

Sirius decided not to alert Dae to the fact that he knew he was really either someone called Leonardo or Felix and headed towards the door. "I'm watching you."

"I'm sure you are." Dae looked expectantly at the door. "Goodnight."

Sirius stalked out without returning the civility and slammed the door behind him. Dae held a finger to his lips and cast several wards before turning to Hermione. "Are you alright?"

"Yes, he can't hurt me." Hermione shuddered. "He makes my flesh crawl though. How did you know he was here?"

"I was on my way to meet with Leo when suddenly Leo swooped out of nowhere and picked me up." Dae vanished the glass that Sirius had been using, and headed to the bar to fix himself and Hermione drinks. "Sirius was tracking me in his animagus form. I half expected him to come to my rooms but when he didn't, I had a feeling he'd come here."

"He won't back off will he?" Hermione took the glass of wine that Dae had poured for her.

"I doubt it." Dae took a mouthful of firewhiskey and gave a small shudder at the raw taste. "He's certainly not stupid and he's also bloody tenacious. I'm going to have to be careful in future."

Hermione sat down. "I'm just glad that Harry was holding detentions tonight. It would have been disastrous if he'd been here."

"I know." Dae headed over to where Hermione's pile of homework sat. "I can't exactly up and leave right now so how about I give you a hand to get through these?"

Hermione felt relieved. "I've been finding it hard to cope, so thanks."

"Why didn't you say anything?" Dae split the pile, taking the larger half. "We would have helped."

"I didn't want to admit that I couldn't deal with everything that was being dumped on me." Hermione admitted.

"That's going to change. I know someone who'd be delighted to mark homework for you." Dae grinned at Hermione. "She's going mad being cooped up."

Hermione knew that Lily didn't do well being locked up as their stint in Dae's house previously had proved. "It will certainly make my life easier."

The pair fell into a comfortable silence as they worked their way through the pile. Once he'd finished Dae stood up. "I'd better be off. I'm going to tell Harry not to come down here for a few nights."

"I think that might be a good idea." Hermione opened the door and stiffened. She didn't know why but she felt as if she was being watched. "Goodnight darling."

Dae guessed that something was wrong and fell into character, pulling Hermione close to him, before swiftly placing a brief kiss on Hermione's lips. He felt uncomfortable holding his niece like that, but

he, like Hermione, felt as if he was being watched. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Sleep well." Hermione closed the door and warded it.

Dae hurried off towards the Dark Arts classroom. Under invisibility and silencing spells, Sirius followed him.

On arriving at the Dark Arts classroom, Dae was glad to find Harry there together with two of his sisters. Dae grinned at Harry. "Having fun?"

Harry pulled a face at Dae and turned to Scarlett and Cassie. "You're both dismissed. If I find you misbehaving in my class again, then I'll start deducting points. Do I make myself clear?"

Cassie nodded. "Sorry, Harry." She kissed him on the cheek. "Goodnight."

Scarlett did the same and the two girls left. Harry sighed and picked up the lines the girls had been writing. "At least they managed to stick to what I'd given them."

"They're quite a handful aren't they?" Dae had had them in detention with him the previous Friday.

"They were bad enough before Christmas." Harry grimaced. "After what happened to Maman and Dad they've gotten even worse." Harry shook himself. "So what brings you here this late at night?"

"I've just left my lovely fiancée all alone in the dungeons, and don't feel tired yet. I wondered if you might be up for a game of cards." Dae looked hopefully at Harry.

At Dae's description of Hermione, Harry knew something was wrong. "After dealing with that pair, I wouldn't say no to a glass of scotch and a few games. Your rooms?"

"Let's go." Dae chatted about school matters as the pair made their way to his rooms. Once inside, Dae invoked every ward he knew

before filling Harry in on what had happened. "If Leo hadn't spotted him, I don't know what would have happened. As it is, he's aware of my animagus form."

"Which is?" Harry still didn't know.

Dae sighed. "I'm a bloody hamster."

Harry couldn't help it; he burst out laughing. "You've got be kidding me."

"No." Dae scowled at Harry. "I think that's enough. We need to work out how the hell Sirius spotted me."

"Perhaps he saw you transforming." Harry suggested, trying to wipe the smile that was still lingering off his face.

Dae shook his head. "I always transform in the middle of the hawthorn bushes across from the Forbidden Forest."

"So unless he deliberately walked into the middle of them, he couldn't have seen you by chance." Harry took the glass of shandy Dae passed to him. "Thanks."

Dae knew that Harry didn't really drink anything other than shandy, even though he occasionally imbibed scotch on special occasions. "So any other ideas?"

"Perhaps he followed you or he was already in the bushes and you couldn't see him." Harry lit the fire and sat down.

"I always check for both of those things before I transform." Dae was very careful about people spotting him.

Harry mulled over the problem as he drank his lemonade infused beer. "What about from above you? You said that was how Leo spotted you and Sirius."

"I didn't think of that." Dae admitted. "That was pretty remiss of me."

“So either someone was on a broomstick or we've got a bird animagus on our hands.” Harry knew of only two bird animagi. “I know there's Jamie and Leo but neither of them would give you away.”

“I'd trust Leo with my life.” Dae left the rest of his thought unspoken.

“You're not trying to tell me you don't trust Jamie?” Harry couldn't believe that Dae would think his brother was capable of something like this.

“Are you will to bet everyone's lives on it?” Dae asked quietly. “Because I'd stake everyone's lives on Leo's trustworthiness. Can you really say the same about Jamie?”

Harry swallowed, before finally shaking his head. “I'd say yes if it just was me but I can't speak for everyone else without asking them.”

“I think we need to speak to Remus and Lily.” Dae pulled out a pack of cards. “Right now, I think I might just need a game to take my mind off things.”

Neither Harry nor Dae played well, and soon both gave up; Harry leaving for his rooms instead of Hermione's, and Dae for his bedroom.

The Next Day

Remus was silent as he listened to what had happened and Dae's suspicions. Dae had expected Remus to deny it the minute he'd mentioned the possibility of Jamie giving them away but he didn't, unlike Lily.

Lily stood up. “No way. Jamie was far too upset when he found about Sirius.”

Unable to sleep, Harry had had the whole night to mull things over. “And Jamie wanted to go running to Sirius if you remember. Dad had to petrify him.”

“But he changed his mind after finding out what Sirius had done.” Lily argued. “Harry, I can’t believe you really think that Jamie would betray us like this.”

“I don’t to be honest.” Harry felt awful at how upset Lily was. “But I have to look at every possibility.”

“What about Leo?” Lily argued. “He could have easily given you up.”

“He’s the one who saved me, Lily.” Dae argued. “He hates Death Eaters; he always has.”

“I refuse to believe that Jamie would do that.” Lily stalked off to the far side of the cavern, unable to look at them.

Remus followed her over and pulled her into his arms. “Lily, no-one’s saying that it is Jamie, just that it might be. They’d be just as entitled to think it could be me, as I’m one of the few people who knows what Dae’s animagus form is.”

“But we know it’s not you. You’ve been here with me the whole time except for the night of the full moon.” Lily felt comforted by Remus’ arms around her. “I just can’t bear to think that Jamie might have turned on us.”

“Me neither.” Remus kissed Lily on the forehead. “Let’s go back to the others.”

Lily let Remus lead her back. “If we think it’s Jamie we need to work out why.”

Remus sat down and pulled Lily onto his lap. “I know he was definitely against the Dark Lord when I was training him. His Occlumency skills were pretty poor and he couldn’t hide the fact that he hated it.”

Harry sighed. “I’d say that he was fine when we had to kill those Death Eaters in front of everyone.”

"What about in the Chamber?" Dae had seen the memory of what had happened with Dumbledore. "Jamie had no problem killing Dumbledore."

Harry hadn't thought of that. "But why would he turn at all?"

"Seville." Hermione suggested. "He'd do anything for her, or perhaps the Dark Lord offered him something he couldn't refuse."

If that was true, then Harry had a feeling he knew what. "How about me?"

"What do you mean?" Hermione wasn't following Harry's train of thought. "Why you?"

"Even though Jamie appears to have gotten over the fact that I've taken everything from him, perhaps he still covets what he can't have." Harry suggested. "What if the Dark Lord offered him the Potter Estate?"

"It doesn't make sense." Lily argued. "You've been more than generous with Jamie."

"Perhaps Jamie doesn't see it that way." Harry knew he was going to have to reveal one of Jamie's darkest secrets. "Do you remember when he wouldn't admit what his boggart had turned into at the Triwizard Tournament?"

Lily nodded. "Of course I do."

"Even though he wouldn't say then, he finally admitted what it was to me." Harry knew he shouldn't be telling the others as he'd agreed to keep Jamie's confidence. "But it was himself."

Lily was horrified. "Why would Jamie's greatest fear be himself?"

"I think he's frightened of what he's capable of." Harry told them. "If he's the traitor, then it looks as if his greatest fear might be true."

Remus could see that Lily was getting upset. "We could keep going round in circles all night and still have no proof that it is Jamie."

"There's something else." Harry didn't want to believe that it might be Jamie but he had to tell them. "When I returned with Orion after I'd marked him, Jamie stayed behind as he said he'd left something in his rooms. He took longer than I'd expected and when he returned he wouldn't meet my eyes. I thought something was wrong but I simply dismissed it as my overactive imagination."

"That doesn't mean he's done anything wrong." Lily got up and started pacing, a sign that she was beginning to get angry as well as upset.

Dae thought of something else. "Sirius knew I'd been seeing Anna. We kept it pretty quiet so I don't see how anyone could have found out unless he'd been told by someone."

Harry blew Dae's theory out of the water. "George Weasley actually spotted you two in a Muggle park when you were first dating, so even though it's highly unlikely, there's every chance that Sirius could have done the same thing."

Remus decided to end the discussion there. "Why don't we agree to keep an eye on Jamie? For the moment we'll give him the benefit of the doubt."

"What about our meetings?" Hermione knew that they were now starting to make headway.

"Jamie's sworn to secrecy about them so he can't go blabbing." Dae stood up. "We can't just stop holding them. If it is him, then he's going to be suspicious if we simply stop."

"I agree." Harry also got to his feet. "I know who most of the Death Eaters are in the school, so I'll keep an eye on them as well. I'll get Orion to help me."

"How is he feeling now?" Lily had removed Orion's original Dark Mark from his hipbone before she'd watched as Harry had moved the new Mark to the same spot.

"Very sore." Harry had had to half carry his brother back up to his rooms. "But he should be back on his feet by tomorrow."

"There's nothing much we can do right now, so let's adjourn this meeting for the moment." Dae suggested. "We'll all keep an eye out and see if anything pans out."

March 14th 1998

Harry headed for the Chamber. He knew he was running late for a training session but he still wanted a quick word with Remus about his lesson plan for the next day. Harry knew he could have easily asked Anna but he hadn't seen Remus since his latest change and he was interested to find out how the latest batch of Wolfsbane had worked for him. Opening the door to the girls' toilet, Harry went white at the sight of the bodies on the floor.

Dashing over to Hermione, Harry quickly checked her and found that she was still breathing, but barely. Slapping a portkey onto her, Harry knelt down beside a bloody and barely coherent Severus. "Severus, what happened?"

Everything hurt and Severus struggled to speak. "Duel. Hermione interfered. Suspended. Help us."

"Who did this?" Harry could see that Severus was a mess.

"Black and..." Harry could do little as Severus passed into unconsciousness.

Harry quickly slapped a portkey onto him and rushed to open the Chamber before heading down to his Dad. "Dad."

Remus could smell the fear on his son before he even came into view and was already making his way towards him, his wand out. "What's wrong?"

“Hermione and Severus. They’ve been attacked.” Harry was pale. “They’re both still alive. I’ve portkeyed them to the Potter Estate but they need medical attention or I’m afraid they’ll die.”

Lily looked at Remus. “We need Craig.”

“He’s too close to Sirius.” Remus couldn’t risk it.

Harry shook his head. “If we don’t risk it, I don’t think they’ll make it.”

“I’ll go.” Lily didn’t give Harry a chance to respond and she disappeared.

“How the hell did he find them?” Harry thought desperately. “Severus always maintained his animagus form until he reached the Chamber.”

“You know who attacked them?” Remus followed Harry as they headed towards the staircase.

“Severus was barely conscious. He said something about a duel and Hermione interfering.” Harry just hoped that Severus didn’t mean what he thought he meant. “Then he said something about suspended and that it was Black and someone else. He passed out before he could tell me who the other person was.”

Remus stood at the bottom of the stairs. “Only Hermione being threatened would have caused Severus to drop out of his animagus form.”

“But how did Sirius know that Severus was even here?” Harry passed Remus a white mask as they hurried up the long staircase.

“Fuck.” Remus suddenly knew. “The Marauders’ Map.”

“Jamie said that Sirius burnt it as Maman wasn’t happy about him having it.” Harry felt like a fool. “Jamie’s the traitor, isn’t he?”

Remus nodded grimly. “I’m sorry Harry but it looks that way.”

“Oh Merlin.” Harry stopped just before they reached the top of the stairs. “Everyone’s in a meeting. They’ll be sitting ducks.”

“The Map doesn’t show the Room.” Remus pointed out.

“But it will show everyone headed that way.” Harry slipped on his own mask and transfigured his clothing. “How much are you willing to bet that Sirius knows the Room exists?”

The pair rushed as quickly as they could towards the Room. Opening the door, they found Sirius and Jamie waiting for them, Jamie’s wand pointed at Luna’s head. “Come in.”

Next chapter: Not quite sure when this will be posted but hopefully on Monday. Unfortunately things will slow up again as school begins once more on Tuesday as I have even more classes than I did for the Fall semester.

Chapter 69: Flight

Fifteen minutes earlier

Sirius reholstered his wand and knelt down by Severus. "You're going to bleed out right here, Snivellus. You know I can't remove the spell you've placed on your daughter, but I could ask my friend here to do it."

"Fuck you." Severus managed to gasp out.

"Amicus." The girl standing by the door called out. "People are just vanishing from the Map."

Sirius stood up and took the Map from the girl. "Let's go." He took one last look at Severus. "I'd like to say that it's been a pleasure but I'd be lying."

Sirius rushed out of the bathroom, the girl hastening after him.

The Room of Requirement

Jamie opened the door to the Room and moved to stand with his assigned group, and began practicing, only to swing round at the sound of his Dad's voice.

"Nobody make any sudden movements or our little friend here dies." Sirius pushed his wand harder into Hannah Abbott's neck making her cry out.

Dae stepped forward. "What seems to be the problem?"

"I know what your group has planned." Sirius snapped. "So unless you wish to say goodbye to Miss Abbott, I want everyone to put their wands down."

Dae was wondering whether to take a chance and tackle Sirius as he was only a few feet away, when Jamie suddenly grabbed Luna. "Luke, step away from Amicus."

Sirius looked at Dae. "Yes, Luke, or should I say Flamel, step away from me."

Dudley started to move towards Jamie, only for Blaise and Draco to grab him. "No, Dudley."

"Jamie, you little shit." Dudley snarled. "If you hurt her, I swear I'll rip you apart with my bare hands."

Jamie laughed. "I'd like to see you try." He dragged Luna back to stand by Sirius. "Now, we're going to wait."

Sirius had no idea what for but Jamie obviously had something in mind. "Now do as I asked and place your wands on the floor in a pile and then you're going to kneel for me."

Dae moved over to where the other children were huddled. "Do as he says." He knew that Sirius wouldn't hesitate to kill any or all of them if they refused.

Just as Dae knelt down, the door flew open to reveal Harry standing there, a white-masked Death Eater right behind him. Jamie turned to face his brother. "Come in."

Sirius guessed that this was who Jamie was waiting for. He was disappointed to realize that Harry had betrayed their Master, and he was going to enjoy teaching him a lesson. "Yes, Alumno. Do come in."

Harry kept out his wand and ignored Sirius. "Let Luna go, Jamie."

"I've already told Dudley that won't happen." Jamie nudged Luna. "She dies if you don't do exactly as I say. Now be a good boy and put down your wand."

Harry put down his wand. "Okay. I've done it."

Jamie smirked. "And the other one; I'm not completely stupid. And you can take off your mask as well."

Harry put down his other wand before removing his mask. He heard Hannah gasp as she saw his face. He smiled positively at her. "Don't worry, Hannah. Everything will be alright."

Sirius looked at the white-masked Death Eater. "What are you doing here?"

"I saw Alumno running this way so I followed him. I thought something was wrong." Remus informed Sirius.

Knowing that the Death Eaters who were stationed in the school would have done exactly that, Sirius didn't even think to question Remus' statement. "Well get over here then."

Remus moved to stand by Sirius. "What should I do now?"

Sirius hid his annoyance at the stupidity of the man. "You can hold the Lovegood girl. I need Jamie to do something for me."

Harry scowled at his brother. "I'm going to get you for this."

"I don't think so, Harry." Jamie passed Luna to Remus, who pulled her tightly against him, his wand at her neck. "You're disarmed. You could try and do something but Luna would end up dead."

Hannah stopped struggling as Sirius whispered something to her, before releasing her. She smiled brightly at Harry. "Looks like you were right, Harry. Everything will be alright, at least for me. I can't say the same for you lot or Professor Snape."

Harry suddenly realized something. "It was you in the girls' bathroom with him, wasn't it?"

Hannah smirked. "So you've found their bodies already?"

"You little bitch." Harry would have gone for her except for the fact that he knew that Sirius would retaliate if he did.

"Bye, Harry." Hannah opened the door and stepped out.

Sirius turned to Jamie. "I'll drop the wards in five minutes so that you can apparate back in."

Jamie nodded and also left.

Sirius closed the door behind him and locked it. Harry could see Orion swapping looks with his sister; worried that Orion would do something stupid if he didn't act soon, Harry decided to engage Sirius in conversation. "So what happened in the bathroom, Amicus?"

"I thought that would have been obvious." Sirius sat down on the chair that appeared. "I disposed of Snivellus in a duel but not before his stupid daughter tried to save him. Anyway, it's not as if they're going to be missed."

Harry tamped down on his rising temper at Sirius' callous dismissal of Hermione and Severus. "But they're not dead."

"They soon will be." Sirius stretched as a glass of wine appeared in his hand. "Snivellus was bleeding out and the spell on his brat will soon deteriorate."

"How could you just leave her to die?" Orion stood up and started to move forward towards Sirius who didn't move. "She was your daughter."

Harry called out to his brother. "Don't try anything, Orion. Severus is still alive which means that if you try anything, you'll be interfering in a pureblood duel."

Sirius smirked. "So even if one of you were able to do anything, which you can't, you'd be dead quicker than you're already going to be."

Orion turned back and pulled Anna to her feet and together they walked towards their father. "So why bother holding Luna hostage then? You know we can't hurt you."

"I can't have you trying to leave, Orion." Sirius informed him. "Now both of you go back and join the others."

“No.” Orion had a feeling that the white masked Death Eater was in fact Remus but he didn’t know for sure. “I won’t.”

With Sirius' attention diverted by Orion, Remus whispered quietly in Luna's ear. “I’m a friend. When I let you go, drop to the floor.”

Luna stopped struggling. Even with the stranger's help, she still couldn’t see how they were going to get out without Sirius killing at least some of them, as none of them could attack him without dying.

After a few minutes, Sirius stood up and dropped the wards on the Room. As he did so, Remus let go of Luna who dropped down onto the floor. Hearing the noise, Sirius span round. “What are you doing?”

Remus pulled off his mask. “Boo.”

At the sight of Remus, Sirius hesitated for a split second giving Remus enough time to throw the portkey he’d been hiding in his hand at him. “Inimicus.”

Harry watched as Sirius disappeared before turning to Remus. “We need a portkey now.”

Remus hurriedly transfigured his cloak into a rope. “Portus.” He then passed the rope to Dudley. “All of you; pick up your wands and then take hold of the rope; quickly now.”

As the others began to take hold of the rope, Dudley and his siblings stared in disbelief at Remus. “Who are you?”

“Not now, Dudley.” Remus checked that everyone was holding on before sending them on their way. “Heart & Home.”

Harry thought quickly. “Dae, you'll need to get Anna, Chloe and Seville out. I'll wait until you reach the Estate to invoke the Fidelius charm.” Dae unlocked the door and hurried out of the Room, the door closing of its own volition behind him.

Harry picked up his wands as he spoke to Remus. "I don't know where Cassie and Scarlett are but we can't leave them here." Harry span round as several cracks sounded just outside of the Room.

Frances appeared in a portrait. "Harry, Voldemort and his men are outside; you need to go."

Remus smiled gratefully at the portrait. "We're not going to have any choice, Harry. Frances is right; we need to go."

Harry didn't want to leave his sisters but knew that they couldn't do anything to help them if they were caught now, and grabbed Remus' arm before touching his ring. "Heart's Messenger."

Voldemort had had to apparate into the corridor outside of the Room. He'd expected to be able to apparate directly into it, but the Room wouldn't allow it. "Check it out."

Six of his men entered the Room. "It's empty, my Lord."

Voldemort swung round on Jamie and Hannah. "Where are they?"

Jamie knelt. "I don't my Lord. When we left they had all been subdued."

Voldemort grabbed Hannah's chin and stared into her eyes. "Don't attempt to fight this."

Hannah did as she was told and let Voldemort invade her mind, wincing at the force behind it.

After finding what he needed to know, Voldemort let Hannah's chin go. "Who was the other Death Eater?"

Jamie had no idea. "I don't know, my Lord."

"Damn." Voldemort turned to his men. "Search this school for any of the students that Abbott told us about."

Voldemort turned to Hannah and Jamie. "Come with me."

The Headmistress' Office

Anna opened her eyes to come face to face with Voldemort.

Voldemort pulled her to her feet. "What happened to you?"

Anna winced as she got up. "Harry, my Lord. He tried to take Seville."

"My daughter; where is she?" Voldemort snapped.

Anna picked up her wand from the floor, and dropped the wards on the entrance to her private rooms. "She's in the spare bedroom."

With Anna right behind him, Voldemort stalked into the bedroom to find Seville sleeping peacefully in bed, and a wave of relief swept through him. "Thank you."

Jamie had been shocked when they'd walked in and found Anna unconscious and bleeding from a head wound. He'd expected her to take Seville and Chloe and leave. He couldn't tell Voldemort that Seville and Anna had been part of the group working against him, and knew that he'd have to wait for Voldemort to leave to question Anna.

Voldemort re-entered Anna's office, and turned to Hannah. "Abbott, your arm."

Hannah nervously held out her arm, letting out a small scream as Voldemort used his wand on her Dark Mark to call his men to him. As they began to apparate to his side, Anna hoped that Dae and the others had gotten safely away. "Alumno has turned traitor. I want him found. Callide, take ten men and search Grimmauld Square. Astus, we'll search the Potter Estate." Voldemort had been there before when he'd requested to see it.

Once Voldemort had left, Jamie turned to Hannah. "I'll see you around at some point."

Hannah smiled at Jamie. "It's nice to know I'm not the only Death Eater here who no-one would suspect."

Jamie knew that Hannah had no idea of who he truly was. "Same here."

Anna knew that Jamie was going to grill her the minute Hannah left, and she wasn't wrong.

"Why didn't you leave?" Jamie sat down on the edge of the desk.

"Because I didn't want to." Anna downed a potion, sighing as her headache began to abate.

"But you're part of Harry's group." Jamie pointed out.

"Was part of Harry's group." Anna countered. "When did you last see me there?"

Jamie hadn't seen Anna attend a single meeting since Chloe had been born. "So you're trying to tell me that you've changed your mind?"

"You obviously did." Anna sat down in an armchair. "Why shouldn't I?"

Jamie didn't believe her. "Dad killed your husband."

"Which is what brought home to me what a fool I'd been." Anna lit the fire, shivering as she thought about what had just happened. "I trusted and loved Remus and look at what he did to me. I had to stand by and watch him declare his love to another woman before he died. At least Sirius was honest about his feelings which is more than I can say for my dearly departed husband."

Jamie moved to sit down opposite Anna. "Do you know where Harry has gone to?"

"No." Anna laughed bitterly. "As if Harry would tell me; when I refused to drop the locking wards on my rooms, he did this to me, accusing me, albeit correctly, of serving Lord Voldemort."

Even though Anna had a huge gash on her forehead, evidence that she had been attacked as she'd claimed, Jamie didn't know what to think. "I still don't know whether to trust you."

"If I was on Harry's side, then why would I still be here?" Anna pointed out. "I could have simply taken Seville and Chloe and left." Anna looked contemplatively at Jamie. "Why didn't you give Seville away?"

"You know I can't." Jamie was bound by his oath. "Why didn't you?"

"Because I think Seville has been lead astray by Harry and Remus." Anna answered simply. "Did you want me to give her away?"

"No." Jamie knew that the Dark Lord wouldn't have taken the news well that his beloved daughter was a traitor. "I love her."

"I thought as much." Anna got up. "I need to heal this cut; I'll be back in a moment."

Anna went into the bathroom and healed her head allowing her a few minutes breathing space to think before she headed back. "So have you decided what you're going to do?"

"About you or Harry?" Jamie asked.

"Both." Anna sat back down.

"Harry will eventually get what's coming to him." Jamie stared hard at Anna. "But I don't know what to think about you."

Anna wondered how to prove she wasn't lying, even though she was. "If I wasn't loyal, then I would have let Seville die when she was attacked yesterday."

Jamie disagreed. "You had witnesses; you couldn't simply let her die."

Anna knew Jamie had a point. "That's true." She thought quickly. "Has Lord Voldemort told you about my mother?"

Jamie was confused. "Why would he tell me about your mother?"

"Because she was his lover until he killed her." Anna watched as comprehension settled on Jamie's face.

"She's the one who betrayed him, isn't she?" Jamie remembered his conversation with Voldemort.

Anna narrowed her eyes. "I thought he'd never told you."

"He just told me about a former lover who'd betrayed him." Jamie admitted. "He didn't give me her name."

"Her name was Selena Gregory and she is the one you can thank for your silver mask and alternate identity." Anna could see that even with this extra information she was sharing, Jamie wasn't convinced. "She left a legacy that I'd like to live up to."

Anna was right; Jamie was suspicious of her claim. "I'm still not quite buying it, Anna."

Anna changed her tack. "Do you have any idea of how much power I have now?" Anna waved her arm around the office. "I'm the Headmistress of the most prestigious wizarding school on the planet. These children are now mine to mold as I see fit. My daughter will want for nothing."

Jamie was a little shocked at the glee that Anna injected into her voice. "As long as you do as our Master says."

"He's given me a pretty long leash, Jamie." Anna was telling the truth. Voldemort had practically given her carte blanche to run the school however she wanted to. "Did all the group leave?"

Jamie nodded. "Yes. Why?"

Anna knew she had something to offer Jamie. "Because if they've all fled, that means Draco's gone, and there's a position open. How would you like to be Head Boy in his place?"

Jamie hesitated for a moment before answering. "You're really going to offer that to me, even though I don't trust you?"

"Of course." Anna got up and poured them both a drink. "As you're Lord Voldemort's apprentice, Remus should have given it to you originally."

Jamie was still more than a little suspicious of Anna's motives but the temptation of being Head Boy was too much. It would give him his own rooms as well as limited power to discipline the other students. "Then thank you."

"I'll arrange for your things to be moved into the Head suite." Anna took a sip of the scotch. "I'm sure you and Hannah will get along famously."

"I'm sure we will." Jamie relaxed as the scotch Anna had given him quickly began to work its way into his system.

"Let's go into my sitting room." Anna held open the door. "It's more comfortable in there."

Jamie gladly followed Anna into the cozier sitting room. Anna made the fire that was burning in the room climb higher with a flick of her wand. "So Jamie, is there anything I can do to prove I'm telling the truth about where my loyalties lie?"

Jamie took a large mouthful of the smooth but deceptively strong scotch before answering. "You can swear to tell me immediately if anyone who is on this list contacts you." Jamie handed over the list that Hannah had made.

Anna had expected him to ask for extra privileges, but took the list and scanned it. "I swear if anyone on this list contacts me, then I will tell you immediately."

Jamie relaxed as Anna passed the list back. "I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt then."

Jamie's words haunted Anna as she remembered Remus using the same words about Jamie. "Thank you. Now how about you?"

"I don't have to prove anything." Jamie answered quietly as he settled more deeply into the armchair he was sitting in.

Jamie had misunderstood her. "I know that, Jamie. I meant would you care to share with me why you changed your mind about serving the Dark Lord? I've told you my reasons; I think it only fair you share yours if we're going to be..." Anna sought suitable wording, and smiled conspiratorially before finishing her sentence. "...partners in crime."

Even though he still didn't totally trust her, Jamie couldn't see any harm in telling Anna. "Because of what the Dark Lord has offered me."

"And that is?" Anna kept her tone casual, even though she was on edge as she listened.

"He's promised to make me immortal." Jamie finished his scotch, and was pleased when the glass began to refill.

Anna was horrified. "That's quite a heady offer."

"I know." Jamie was glad that he had someone he could boast to at last. "He's promised me that Seville will stand at my side."

Anna knew that when Seville found out that Jamie had betrayed them all, she might see things a little differently. "Is that the only reason you changed your mind?"

Jamie shook his head. "I'm going to get what should have been mine."

"What do you mean?" Anna asked innocently.

Jamie frowned as if trying to remember something, and then shook his head. "All the Potter lands and titles will be mine."

"But Harry's still alive." Anna pointed out.

"Not for long." Jamie was hoping that Voldemort would let him deal with his brother.

Anna couldn't believe the difference in the boy sitting in front of her from how he'd been six months before. "I expect that you want to be the one to take him out, don't you?"

"Of course." Jamie didn't hide the fact. "But it should have been Dad."

"Where is Sirius?" Anna already knew from Dae exactly where Sirius was.

"I'm quite sure Harry has him." Jamie admitted as he knocked back the last of the scotch. "If he has, then I know he or someone else is going to kill Dad."

"You don't seem that upset about it." Anna observed as the glass refilled for the third time.

"Dad knew the score." Jamie had had sacrifice drilled into him by Sirius time and time again. "And I'll take his place if he doesn't return."

"What about the horcrux that Sirius was carrying?" Anna knew that Jamie was aware she knew about it.

"You don't really think that that was the only one my Master has, do you?" Jamie's words were now starting to slur as the potent scotch that Anna had kept in stock specifically for Remus began to affect his judgment.

“Someone as intelligent as the Dark Lord wouldn’t put all of his eggs in one basket, now would he?” Anna just hoped that Jamie had some idea of how many others there were.

Jamie waved his glass in the air, sloshing some of the scotch onto the carpet. “Nope.” He gave a small giggle. “And guess who he’s trusted the other horcrux with?”

Anna was relieved that there appeared to be only one more. “I have no idea.”

“Me.” Jamie looked proud as he knocked back yet more scotch. “I’ve been chosen to take care of it.”

“That’s quite an honor, Jamie.” Anna lied. “How long have you been carrying it?”

By now, Jamie was struggling to focus. “Nov... Nov...”

Anna watched dispassionately as Jamie slumped to the floor, the glass rolling out of his hand. “Now where would it be?”

Anna rolled Jamie onto his back and started to check over his person. As her hand touched a necklace, she was thrown backwards. Picking herself up off the floor, Anna winced at the pain that shot through her head. If she hadn’t had werewolf strength, she was convinced that she would have joined Jamie in an unconscious state on the floor. Anna scowled down at Jamie and thought about their conversation. She didn’t want him remembering any of the discussion they’d had about the horcrux. “Obliviate.”

After altering Jamie’s memory, Anna headed into the bathroom where she quickly healed her head yet again and took another pain potion. She was completely lost as to what to do with the horcrux that was obviously dictating Jamie’s behavior; at least she hoped that that was all it was. Heading back into her sitting room, she grabbed an anti-hangover potion and force-fed it to Jamie before calling for Restus. “Can you please remove Jamie to the Head Boy’s bedroom and pop him into bed for me? He’s imbibed a little too much of my scotch.”

Restus, who knew better than to interfere in the Headmistress' business bowed and left with Jamie. Anna paced the floor as she tried to think of how to get a message to Dae. Suddenly she had an idea. "French."

French appeared. "Mistress Anna?"

"I need to get a message to Dae." Anna looked hopefully at the house-elf.

"I cannot find him or Pasha, Mistress Anna." French looked sorry.

"Damn." Anna had hoped that French had been there when Harry had invoked the Fidelius as she had no idea where they were. "If you hear from him, can you please tell him and the others not to try to contact me? They need to use Remus or Lily instead."

"Of course, Mistress Anna." French bowed and disappeared.

Anna went into the bedroom to check on Seville; she was now only just getting over the attack on her, and was still in a deep sleep. Anna was glad that Seville hadn't been in the Room when Sirius had ambushed the other children; she had a feeling that Sirius would have taken great pleasure in hurting her, and that this time Voldemort wouldn't have stepped in to protect his daughter.

After checking on Chloe and setting up a ward to warn her if her daughter needed her, she headed into her office to think. With Dae, Harry and Hermione all gone, she now had the problem of trying to cover their positions.

The Potter Estate

As soon as he arrived at the gates of the Estate, Harry grabbed Remus and apparated them both to where he knew Severus and Hermione would be. "Where the hell is Maman and Healer Delaney?"

Luna, who was watching over Severus, shook her head. "I don't know. Harry, he can't do anything to help Severus. He'd be interfering if he did."

Harry swore. "I didn't think of that."

"But you interfered." Dudley pointed out. "You portkeyed Severus here."

"Severus asked for Harry's help." Remus interceded. "I'm not sure how much you know about it, but in a true pureblood duel, there's slightly more leeway to bend the rules than in the type of duel that Harry had with Amicus." He didn't dare mention Sirius' true name as he wasn't sure who knew it out of Harry's group.

Luna had no such reservations about revealing who Amicus was. "But Sirius said that it was pureblood terms that he and Harry were fighting on."

"That might be so, but as Harry isn't a pureblood, then it wasn't a true pureblood duel." Remus quickly explained. "As a half-blood, Harry couldn't have done what Severus did."

Dudley wondered who the man doing an exceptional impersonation of his Dad really was. "What do you mean?"

"Severus was able to ask for help; something Harry wouldn't have been able to do in his duel with Sirius." Remus explained. "With Severus, Sirius had already walked away so he wasn't able to revoke Severus' request for help. If he'd still been there, things would have been very different."

Luna frowned. "How was it that you were able to portkey Sirius here?"

"Because my motives were purely to enable the duel to be completed." Remus explained. "If the magic had determined otherwise, I'd be dead now."

Luna looked disbelieving at Remus. "You can't be serious about completing the duel; Severus is barely alive."

"I'm well aware of that." Remus turned to Harry. "We need to talk to Sirius." He then turned back to Luna. "If Craig arrives, tell him to hold off treating Severus, he'll die if he does."

In the basement of the house, Harry and Remus walked towards the cell where Sirius was sitting on the only piece of furniture in there, a small bed. Remus didn't beat about the bush. "We need you to yield the duel to Severus."

Sirius looked at Remus. "Who the hell are you, and where are my wands?" When Sirius had found himself in the cell, both of his wands had vanished.

"It doesn't matter who I am or where your wands are. You didn't really think we'd let you keep them, did you?" Remus snapped, aware that time was running out for Severus. "Will you yield?"

Sirius realized that the man who looked like the werewolf was serious. "And if I don't?"

"Then I'm going to let everyone here who can, take turns to take you apart bit by bit once Severus is dead." Harry informed him.

"And what happens if I yield?" Sirius knew that Harry wouldn't let him live either way. "It's not as if you're going to let me simply walk out."

"If you agree to yield to Severus, then I give you my word that if you win a duel against me, you can leave." Harry leant against the bars. "Provided you also agree to release me from my oath, of course."

Sirius smirked as he knew Harry had no chance of beating him. "Very well. I give you my word that I'll yield to Snivellus and that I'll release you from your oath for the duration of the duel."

Remus couldn't believe what Harry had done but didn't want to take his son to task in front of Sirius. "We want your word that you won't attempt to escape or attack anyone while we take you to do this."

"I give you my word." Sirius knew that he had no chance of getting out if he refused. Remus unlocked the door. "Come with us."

Sirius walked into the room where Severus was lying. Harry held up his hand as everyone shot to their feet. "Sit down."

Harry gave Sirius his wand. "Enervate him."

Severus came to but was unable to open his eyes properly due to the injuries on his face. "Harry?"

"It's me, Snivellus." Sirius leant over him. "I yield. Do you accept?"

Harry placed his hand on Severus' shoulder. "Please Severus. It's the only way to save you."

"Can't." Severus coughed blood up. "Swore oath to make him pay for hurting Hermione."

Sirius knew how to counteract the oath, and pulled open his tattered shirt revealing multiple bloody gashes and burn marks that, without his wands, he hadn't had a chance to heal. "See. You've made me pay for hurting her; you've fulfilled your oath. Will you now accept my capitulation?"

Severus struggled to open fully the one eye that wasn't encrusted with blood and saw the damage he'd inflicted on Sirius. "I accept." Severus then closed his eyes, as the effort of staying conscious became too much for him.

At that moment everyone in the room who could, drew their wands on Sirius. Harry turned to them. "Don't; I've already given him my word that if he yielded to Severus I would let him live."

"Why Harry?" Dudley kept his wand drawn.

"Because I'm going to do what I should have done the last time we fought." Harry took his wand back from Sirius and incanted a spell. Chains appeared on Sirius' wrists and arms, and Harry then turned to

Dudley and Blaise. "Would you two mind escorting him back to his cell?"

"What?" Sirius was furious. "You said that you'd meet me in a duel if I yielded to Snivellus."

"I did, didn't I? I just didn't say when." Harry was exhausted and, even though she wouldn't be aware of him, he wanted some time alone with Hermione if he could before he had to face Sirius. "We'll do this in the morning."

At that moment, Lily appeared with Narcissa and Craig; their daughter standing between them. "Sorry we took so long."

Narcissa's face turned ugly at the sight of Sirius, and she advanced on him before punching him in the face. "You lying Death Eater bastard."

Remus grabbed her and pulled her away from Sirius. "Calm down, Narcissa."

"I'm going to kill him." Narcissa was spitting mad as she tried to free herself from Remus' unrelenting grasp. "You tried to murder my son."

Draco picked up a scared Lizzie. "Come sit with me. Uncle Sirius has been a naughty boy and Mummy's just telling him off."

Lizzie wrapped her arms around her brother's neck and let him carry her to the other side of the room.

Wanting to stop things from escalating, Harry stepped in between Narcissa and Sirius. "And Sirius is going to pay for it, Mrs. Delaney. I've challenged him to a duel and he's accepted. Tomorrow we will end this."

Sirius stared at Lily. "First you lot use Lupin's likeness to catch me unawares; now you're sick enough to use my dead wife's face to inveigle Narcissa's help."

“I’m not using anything, Sirius.” Lily walked over to her husband. “Unfortunately I am your wife.”

Harry flicked his wand and the chains on Sirius affixed themselves to the wall; even in chains, Harry didn’t trust Sirius not to try and hurt Lily. “Healer Delaney, can you please help Severus and Hermione?”

Dae, who had resumed his usual appearance, pulled Craig to one side before he did. “Hermione is in some sort of suspended animation. From what we can gather she interfered in a pureblood duel.”

“Shit.” Craig glanced at the pulpy mess that was Severus. “He needs treating first.”

Harry could do little as Craig went to work on Severus, and he turned his attention to Sirius and his accusations. “Maman is telling the truth, Sirius. She really is still unfortunately your wife.”

Sirius didn’t believe Harry. “I saw her die.”

“Just like you saw me die.” Remus smirked at Sirius, and threw a wand at Lily. “Show him.”

Lily aimed the wand at Remus. “Avada Kedavra.”

Everyone in the room stood transfixed as Remus crumpled to the ground, apparently dead. Harry smiled maliciously at Sirius and enervated his Dad. “See.”

Sirius snarled and pulled at the chains. “After I finish with your son, Lupin, I’m going to take great pleasure in making your death a slow and painful one.”

“Dream on.” Remus turned his back on Sirius. Harry knew that Sirius would try and attack Remus if he released him. “Pasha.”

“Yes, Master Harry.” Pasha was a little nervous with everyone in the room.

“Black here needs returning to his cell.” Harry knew that the little house-elf could deliver Sirius back to his cell, and get out without being harmed.

Everyone let out a sigh of relief as the house-elf and Sirius both vanished. Suddenly Harry’s head snapped up. “The wards.”

“We need to invoke the Fidelius charm now.” Remus snapped.

Harry grabbed Remus and they both disappeared. Anna stepped over to where her mother was standing. “Is it really you?”

“Yes.” Lily gasped as Anna slapped her across the face.

“I thought you were dead, and you let me. I hate you.” Anna ran out of the room.

Lily went to follow, only for Orion to stop her. “I’ll go after her. After finding out about Jamie today, I think discovering you’re still alive was a bit too much for her.”

Remus suddenly reappeared with Harry. “The house is safe.”

Dudley, even though he was angry at what Remus had done, knew that his Dad had to have a good reason not to tell them and he simply grabbed him, pulling him into a hug. “Dad.”

“I’m sorry I didn’t tell you.” Remus looked over Dudley’s head at Georgie and Auri, who both promptly burst into tears and ran to him.

Narcissa put her arm around Lily. “It’s just been a bit of shock for Anna. It was hard enough for me to believe.”

Dae knew that it was time to reveal who he was as well. “There’s something else you should know, Narcy.”

“I think you’re being a little informal, don’t you, Mr. Venant?” Even though Narcissa had met Dae in their Alliance meetings several times, she was a little aback at his familiarity.

“Not really.” Dae dropped his disguise. “Hi, Narcy.”

Narcissa was almost speechless. “But...”

Draco gasped as he looked over from where he was trying to distract Lizzie. “But you’re dead. I saw Harry’s memory of Sirius killing you.”

“What Sirius couldn’t show Harry was that I didn’t die after he dropped me over the cliff.” Dae could see that his revelation was a big shock to Narcissa. “I was found by Perenelle Flamel. Even knowing that I was a Death Eater she took me in and cared for me, before eventually adopting me. I don’t go by Regulus Black now. My adopted name is Felix Felidae Flamel.”

Draco sniggered. “FFF?”

“My new parents named me after their grandfathers; it was just unfortunate that I got lumbered with those names.” Dae hated the names but not wanting to upset his parents had said nothing about it.

“I can see where you got Felidae from but what about Venant?” Draco asked.

“It’s an old family name, Draco. Obviously thinking you were dead, I never connected the name to you.” Narcissa was still surprised that Dae had used it. “Why use a name connected with the Black family?”

“Because I didn’t want to lose my connection to the family totally.” Dae admitted. “Just because I hated Sirius didn’t mean that I felt the same way about you and Draco.”

“I’m glad.” Narcissa hugged her cousin. “So what name do you prefer to go by, Flamel or Venant?”

“Actually I’m so used to being Felidae Venant at work, that’s what I favor.” Dae wished he’d told Narcissa sooner. “But I prefer Dae, rather than Felidae.”

“Then that’s what I’ll call you.” Narcissa placed a kiss on his cheek.

While Narcissa was learning the truth about Dae, Harry had gravitated over to where Hermione lay on the bed. "Hermione, hold on."

Luna sat down next to him, her expression grave. "There's nothing we can do, Harry. The magic will take her life for interfering."

"I won't accept that." Harry stroked his wife's hair. "How long can we keep her like this?"

Craig, who had finally finished stabilizing Severus, looked over. "Because no-one's ever done it before, I honestly don't know. It could be days, weeks or months."

"I need a more concrete idea of how long." Harry wasn't going to lose his wife now.

"I'm sure you've got a good library here. I'll start researching now." Luna kissed Harry on his head before heading out of the room, determined to do everything she could to help her friend. Dudley followed her out.

Seeing the bereft look on Harry's face, Auri turned to Georgie. "Come on, we're going to help her as well." Theo Nott stood up. "I'm good at research; I'll come too."

Lily watched her nieces and Nott leave before turning to face the remaining shocked and upset children. "We need to find rooms for you all. You can't return to Hogwarts, so we're going to have to make the best of what we've got here." She turned to Narcissa. "I don't mean to break up your reunion but I could do with your help."

Dae gave his cousin a gentle nudge. "Go on then; I can tell you're dying to get stuck in." Lily and Narcissa both started to organize the group and allocate rooms.

Remus marched over to where Harry was holding Hermione's hand. "We need to talk."

Harry kissed his wife on the cheek and got up. "Let's go to the study."

Dae left the women to it and followed Harry and Remus. Once inside the study, Remus turned on Harry. "What the hell were you playing at offering Sirius a duel?"

"Do you think Sirius would have let Severus live if I hadn't?" Harry countered.

"Probably not, but you're risking the safety of everyone here, and not just one man." Remus argued. "Sirius was here when we invoked the Fidelius curse; he'll be able to return."

"I'm not completely stupid, Dad." Harry had already thought of that. "If I fail, then someone will have to kill him."

"But you swore he could leave." Remus pointed out.

"I didn't say unharmed, now did I?" Harry leant back against the desk. "I only said he could leave."

"Then why didn't you let someone simply kill him? You wouldn't have broken your word and he'd no longer be a problem." Dae headed over to the drinks cabinet. "It would have been far simpler."

"Because I want the satisfaction of killing him. I want him to die at my hand, and mine alone." Harry knew that he was letting his personal feelings dictate how he was feeling, but he couldn't help it. "And there was no way he would ever just release me from my oath to do that."

Dae passed Harry a glass of scotch. "I understand."

Harry glanced at Remus who didn't look so understanding. "I will beat him this time, Dad."

"I hope so." Most of Remus' anger stemmed from fear for his son. "But wanting to kill someone is a slippery slope, Harry."

"Dad, I have to do this." Harry took a tiny sip of the scotch. "If Severus hadn't acted when he had, Hermione would be dead. I can't just forget that it's Sirius' fault."

Remus knew he would have done the same. "I can't say I'm happy about it, but I'll support you."

"Thanks." Harry was relieved that he wouldn't have to fight his Dad about it.

After finishing off the contents, Remus put down his glass. "I need to go back to Hogwarts."

"You can't, Dad." Harry knew that Remus was concerned about Scarlett and Cassie. "Anna will look after the girls."

"And if she can't?" Remus was worried sick about his daughter and niece.

Dae tried to allay Remus' fears. "She will. She didn't leave in the first place because she was afraid for the students." Dae hadn't been able to change Anna's mind, even though he'd begged. "The Dark Lord had threatened them if she didn't do as she was told."

Dae's words didn't help Remus. "I can understand why Anna stayed, but why didn't you take Chloe?"

"Because Anna said she would be safer at Hogwarts. If the Dark Lord managed to somehow find us, she didn't want our daughter in the line of fire." Dae just hoped that his fiancée's assumption was right. "I know the Dark Lord tried to kill Jamie and Harry when they were babies but I don't he'll kill Chloe without good reason."

"You're probably right." Remus wasn't going to back down about his daughter and niece though. "I'm still going to get the girls out."

Dae knew that Remus wouldn't rest until they were with him. "I'll get them. I can get in easier than any of you."

Harry shook his head. "Neither of you are going; the girls have no idea of what is happening so they should be safe."

Dae could see that Remus disagreed. "Remus, I'll go tomorrow after Harry has dealt with Sirius. I'd like a final word with my brother before he dies."

Harry suddenly disappeared. Remus turned to Dae. "What the hell?"

Five minutes later Harry was back with Nia, Grim and Kai. Remus let out a sigh of relief. "You frightened me for a minute."

Nia paled at the sight of her former dead husband. "Who is this?"

Harry wished he'd apparated Nia somewhere else. "I'll get Dudley to explain, Mum." Harry then led Nia, Grim and Kai out and towards the library.

Remus sighed. "I can't believe we forgot about Nia."

"We were a little distracted, Remus." Dae reminded him. "I think you'd best go give Dudley some support. Nia's going to have a horrible shock when she finds out about Lily."

Remus groaned. "Nia's going to kill me. You do know that, don't you?"

Dae grinned. "Which is why I'm going back to help Narcissa."

Remus flipped his friend the finger before stalking out of the room.

Later that day

A now sober Jamie found Cassie and Scarlett sitting together in the library. "I need to talk to both of you."

Cassie was surprised at the severe look on Jamie's face. "What is it?"

Jamie held out his hands. "Come with me." Jamie led them to his new rooms and sat them down. "Draco's gone which is why I'm now Head Boy."

Cassie frowned. "What do you mean by gone?"

"Hold on, and I'll explain." Jamie knocked on Hannah's door. "Can you come out for a minute?"

Hannah did as he asked. "Hi Cassie, Scarlett."

"We've got a confession to make." Jamie watched as a puzzled look appeared on the girls' faces.

"You're not dating Hannah are you?" Cassie had thought that Jamie was happy with Seville.

Hannah laughed. "No, we're not dating." She let the smile drop off her face. "It's much worse than that."

"We're Death Eaters." Jamie wasn't surprised as both Cassie and Scarlett backed away from him and Hannah. "We didn't want to do it. We had to."

Cassie stopped retreating. "Why?"

"Because the Dark Lord threatened to kill everyone in our families if we refused." Jamie let his head fall. "I said no at first and look at what happened to Uncle Remus and Mum. It's my entire fault they're dead, and I'm sorry. I couldn't bear to lose anyone else so I agreed to do as the Dark Lord demanded."

Cassie flew back across the room to hug her brother. "It's okay, Jamie." She turned to Scarlett. "We'll help you, won't we?"

Scarlett nodded. "Harry and Dudley will help you as well."

Jamie shook his head. "They can't. The Dark Lord is after them."

"Why?" Scarlett's voice shook as she thought of her brothers.

"Because they've formed a group to fight the Dark Lord." Hannah informed the girls. "The Dark Lord found about them today, so they've fled together with some of the other students."

“Oh Merlin.” Scarlett sat down. “Who?”

“I’ll show you the list in a minute.” Jamie could feel Cassie shaking as she struggled not to cry. “There’s more.”

“Go on.” Scarlett was barely holding on to her own tears.

“Harry attacked Anna...” Jamie rubbed his sister’s back as she shook. “...for protecting Seville.”

“Harry would never hurt Anna.” Scarlett defended her brother.

“Harry wanted Seville to hold for ransom.” Jamie explained. “Anna could have died; Harry hurt her really badly.”

Scarlett sat down as her legs began to shake. “I don’t believe it.”

“Ask Anna who attacked her, and why.” Jamie challenged Scarlett.

“I will.” Scarlett got up again.

Jamie, Hannah and Cassie followed Scarlett to Anna’s office. Anna opened the door to meet them. “What brings you four here?”

“Is it true, Anna?” Scarlett could feel her heart pounding in fear at what Anna would say. “Did Harry attack you and try to take Seville?”

Jamie smirked at Anna from behind his sister's back. Anna knew he was testing her. “Yes, Scarlett he did.”

Scarlett burst into tears. “How could he?”

“We've told them that we're Death Eaters, Anna.” Jamie led his sister into the office. “But I can’t tell them everything they need to know about Harry and what he was.”

Anna hid her disgust at Jamie’s deviousness. “Girls, Harry was the Death Eater known as Alumno but he turned against Lord Voldemort.”

“But that’s good isn’t it?” Cassie asked hopefully.

“I’d be careful what you say, Cassie.” Anna did the only thing she could with Jamie and Hannah watching, and rolled up her left sleeve. “You seem to forget who I serve.”

Cassie knew that Anna taken the Dark Mark but had thought that it had been under duress. “I’m sorry.”

“I’ll let it go this time as you’re obviously upset about finding out about your siblings and cousins’ betrayal.” Anna cursed Jamie in her head. “But don’t let it happen again. You’re dismissed.”

Jamie and Hannah led the two girls out and back to their rooms. “You’re going to have to help us.”

“What do you need us to do?” After Anna had turned out to be the Dark Lord’s servant, Scarlett was now terribly frightened of her Dad’s former wife.

Jamie pulled out a copy of the list that Hannah had made; he’d also added Dae as well as his animagus form to the list as he’d disappeared from the school. “This is a list of everyone who disappeared. Luke Walker is a red-headed, skinny looking man. If you see any of them, hide, and then come and tell one of us. You’ve already seen that we can’t trust Anna, and if she sees them first, she’ll tell You-Know-Who. There’s something else, Anna might try and convince you that she’s on your side; believe me she’s not. You can’t trust her.”

Cassie and Scarlett looked at each other. “Don’t worry we won’t let you down. We’ll help you.”

Jamie hugged both girls, a nasty smile playing across his lips. “I know you will.”

Next Chapter: Harry takes on Sirius and Dae returns to Hogwarts.

Chapter 70: The Duel

Warning: There's some unpleasantness and violence in this chapter as well as bad language.

Harry woke up and stretched. Hermione was lying motionless next to him. Harry brushed her hair out of her face and kissed her softly before getting up and heading into the bathroom. When he'd washed and changed, he called out. "Calbot."

A small female elf appeared and bowed low. "Master Harry."

"Please stay with my wife until I return." Harry then walked out of the room, his stomach going over as he contemplated that it might be the last time he saw her.

Knocking on the door of the room next to his, Harry received a weak response to come in. Pushing open the door, he found Severus propped up against the pillows. "Severus, how are you feeling?"

"As if someone ripped off my face and trod on my hand." Severus tried to smile but it was still too painful.

Harry couldn't believe how much this Severus now resembled the alternate Severus. "I'm really sorry."

"It's not your fault, Harry." Severus tried to sit up but the pain was too much.

Harry moved to pick up a pain potion, and passed it to Severus who gratefully drank it. "I know that. Severus, we're going to do whatever we can to help Hermione."

"I know you will." Severus had been glad that he'd still had his wand in his hand when Hermione had suddenly produced a wand out of nowhere and attacked Sirius. "Hermione shouldn't have tried to help me."

"She must have been frightened you'd die." Harry knew that he would have done the same for his own father.

"I thought I was going to." Severus admitted. "And I'd rather have died than have Hermione try to help me; she almost succeeded in killing Black. If Hannah hadn't pushed him out of the way of Hermione's curse, he would have been dead. As it was, all I had time to do was to throw a suspension spell on Hermione before I collapsed."

"Luna and the others were researching most of last night. Unfortunately we know that as Hermione swore not to attack Sirius and she interfered in a pureblood duel, we've got our work cut out, but we're going to find the answer." Harry was determined.

Severus felt comforted by Harry's confidence. "I hope so."

Harry knew that he'd go to pieces if he let himself think any differently. "Dad's gone to fetch Virginie. He would have done it last night but Craig said you wouldn't be awake until this morning anyway, and there was no reason to tire her out sitting up with you."

"Thank you." Severus was nervous about seeing his wife.

The door suddenly flew open and Virginie ran into the room, only to come to a halt as she saw the state Severus was in. "Oh Severus, what did he do to you?"

Harry left and closed the door behind him. Virginie walked more sedately to the bedside. Severus knew that he hadn't been attractive before Sirius had inflicted his wounds on him; he didn't even want to guess how terrible he looked now. "Virginie, I understand if you don't want to be with me looking like this."

Virginie's face took on a scowl. "Severus Snape, I'd still love you if you had no eyes and wounds all over your body. Would you still love me if it had happened to me?"

"I'd love you no matter what." Severus knew that Remus must have told her that Sirius had removed his eye, as that part of his face was still covered with a bandage but Severus was also aware that the scars Sirius had inflicted would still be visible as they ran the course of one side of his face.

"And the same for me." Virginie kissed Severus on the lips. "Don't take this the wrong way but why haven't they healed the scars?"

"They can't." Severus knew that he would wear them until he died. "Black made sure of that."

"Bastard." Virginie stood up. "I'm going to kill him for this."

"No, you're not." Severus grabbed Virginie's hand. "Craig told me that Harry's already challenged him to a duel for what he's done to Hermione."

Virginie's face dropped at the mention of her daughter and tears filled her eyes. "We're going to lose her, aren't we?"

Severus shook his head, trying not to grimace as despite the potion he'd taken, pain shot through his face. "Harry and his friends are doing everything they can to find a way to save her."

"What if they can't?" Virginie let her tears start to fall.

"You can't think that way." Severus tugged at Virginie. "Sit next to me."

Virginie did better than that and slid on the bed next to her husband, carefully wrapping her arm around his waist and lying her head on his chest. "I love you, Severus."

"I love you too." Severus closed his eye and relaxed.

Sirius' Cell

Dae stood outside the cell. "Black."

"Come to gloat, Venant?" Sirius hated the man who stood in front of him.

"Actually yes." Dae removed his disguise. "Hi Siri."

Sirius laughed. "Please. I might believe Lily and Lupin's miraculous return from the dead but my brother's, I don't think so. I admit I thought you might have been Reg when I saw your animagus form but you don't have the Dark Mark and he most definitely did."

"That's because Lily removed it." Dae informed him. "As she's done with everyone's Mark."

"That's impossible." Even as Sirius refused to believe it, he was also aware that if anyone could have done it, it would have been Lily. "So you'll forgive me if I ask you to leave. I've better things to do with my time than listen to you trying to convince me that you're my brother."

"Who else knows that you once stole Father's wand and turned Kreacher in a bat?" Dae leant against the bars as Harry had done the previous night.

"Kreacher did." Sirius pointed out. "You'll need to do better than that."

"Okay." Dae thought back. "The reason I'm so frightened of heights is that you once hung me over the banister from the top of Grimmauld Place, threatening to drop me if I didn't share my chocolate frogs with you."

Sirius stiffened. No-one else had been there when he'd threatened his brother before relaxing again. "Reg could have told anyone that."

Dae knew that Sirius wouldn't believe him unless he took drastic measures, so he pulled out his wand. "I swear on my magic and my life that I was once known as Regulus Black and that I am indeed your brother."

Sirius watched as the magic engulfed Dae before vanishing. He knew that this had to be his brother, otherwise the man in front of him would be dead. "Reg?"

"Yes, Siri." Dae watched conflicting emotions cross Sirius' face; he was surprised to see tears in Sirius' eyes.

Sirius struggled to find his voice for a moment. "I'm so sorry for what I did to you."

Dae shook his head incredulously. "You brought my worst nightmare to life, Sirius, and you try and tell me that you're sorry."

"I didn't want to do it." Sirius defended his actions. "But I had to. You were once part of the same team I'm on; you knew the score. It's not as if you haven't killed for the Dark Lord before."

Dae hated being reminded of his sordid past. "But I'd have never killed a family member."

"I did what had to do." Sirius argued. "Just as you should have done."

"Not if it meant hurting those I loved I wouldn't." Dae stepped back. "Look at what you've become Sirius. You tried to kill your wife and your friend."

"They deserved it." Sirius believed he'd been truly justified in what he'd done.

"And you threatened a woman who'd just given birth and her baby daughter." Dae pointed out. "That's low, even for you."

"I wouldn't have hurt them." Sirius watched as Dae's face took on a look of disbelief.

"I find that hard to believe." Dae looked Sirius in the eye. "If you had hurt them I'd have hunted you down and killed you for it."

"You'd have died and you know it." Sirius could see that Dae was completely serious. "Why risk your own life for Lupin's wife and daughter?"

"Because Chloe's my daughter." Dae admitted.

"Chloe's really your daughter?" Sirius was shocked.

"Yes." Dae took satisfaction in knowing that he'd surprised Sirius. "Remus agreed to marry Anna to keep her and Chloe safe from the Dark Lord."

"He wouldn't have hurt a baby." Sirius told his brother.

"He tried to kill Harry and Jamie." Dae pointed out.

"That was for an entirely different reason and you know it." Sirius reminded Dae. "And besides, Anna is Selena's daughter."

"You know about that?" It was Dae's turn to be surprised.

"Of course." Sirius snapped. "Lord Voldemort is not only my Master, he's my friend as well. I know a lot more about him than you'll ever know."

"Lucky you." Dae let sarcasm tinge his voice.

"Oh but I am." Sirius smiled. "Tell me, Reg, where's your precious Anna now?"

"At Hogwarts; she wouldn't leave." Dae didn't mind telling Sirius as he knew that the information wouldn't be going anywhere.

"Now why would she do that?" Sirius started to walk away from the bars. "Perhaps it because she's not really on your side."

"Nice try, Siri, but it won't work." Dae brushed off Sirius' intimation. "Anna stayed because she cares about the lives of her students."

"Does she share everything with you?" Sirius sat down on the bed and leant up against the wall stretching his long legs out in front of him.

"What do you mean?" Dae couldn't believe how confidently Sirius was acting.

"As in do you know everything about her?" Sirius lifted an eyebrow. "It's a simple question."

"Of course I do." Dae went to walk away; he'd had his fill of Sirius. "I've had enough of this. I just wanted you to let you know that you failed to kill me."

"So she told that she's Voldemort's daughter then?" Sirius waited for Dae to turn back and he wasn't disappointed. "Your precious daughter is Voldemort's granddaughter, Reg."

"You're lying." Dae snarled. "Mac Jameson had a paternity test done, and Anna is his daughter."

"Do you really think that Jameson would want to admit to the fact that the little girl he thought was his was really our Master's?" Sirius slid his hands behind his head as he waited for Dae to respond.

"So if that was true, then why did you try and kill her when she was first teaching at Hogwarts?" Dae pointed out the flaw in Sirius' argument. "Your precious Master would hardly kill his daughter."

"That's because he didn't know then she was his daughter." Sirius stood up. "She disappeared into the Muggle world and that's where he thought she'd remained. It was a bit of a shock when he got the school records and checked them."

Dae hesitated as doubt started to creep in until he thought of something else. "Anna's great-grandfather was a werewolf so Mack has to be her father."

"Her great-grandfather on her mother's side, Reg, not her father's." Sirius knew he had Dae unsettled. "And speaking of werewolves, why do you think that Voldemort was so adamant about Anna being married to Lupin. He didn't want his daughter giving birth to a child out of wedlock."

Dae's face now reflected his uncertainty. "You're lying."

"But I'm not." Sirius smirked. "Anna didn't leave Hogwarts because Seville's her sister, and the Dark Lord has given her the school to be

her playground. Why else would he give a junior teacher the Headmistress' position?"

Dae felt sick. "Anna would never betray us like that."

"Why not?" Sirius smirked. "Jamie has."

"I hope Harry makes you suffer before you die." Unable to listen to Sirius any longer, Dae marched out, leaving a smiling Sirius behind him.

Dae stormed up the stairs only to run into Remus, who was taken aback at the angry look on his face. "Dae, what's wrong?"

Dae pulled him into a room and told him. "I can't believe it."

"Then don't." Remus told him. "Sirius is just playing with you. He knows how to pull your strings, Dae."

"But what if he's right?" Dae couldn't help worrying that Sirius was telling the truth.

"Then we'll deal with it but I've known Anna for years and I don't believe what he's saying." Remus tried to comfort Dae. "She's never once given any indication that she'd turn on us like Jamie did."

Dae let out a huge sigh. "I'm going to see her when I go for the girls."

"You're taking a huge risk just going for the girls; Anna is safe for the moment either way." Remus didn't want Dae risking his life over a nasty suggestion made by Sirius.

"I have to know, Remus." Dae opened the door. "Tell Harry good luck."

Remus watched as Dae headed up to his room. He wanted to kill Sirius himself for upsetting his friend like that. Harry walked by on his way down to the cell. "It's time, Dad."

"I know, Harry." Remus pulled Harry into a hug. "I'm coming with you."

"I thought you might." Harry let his Dad go. "I've going to give Sirius both of his wands. I want a no-holds barred duel."

"Harry, are you sure about that?" Remus knew that meant that anything went.

"Yes." Harry made his way down to where they were holding Sirius. "Are you ready Black?"

"Always." Sirius held out his hand. "My wand?"

"One moment." Harry waited for Luna, Dudley, Orion and Narcissa to file into the room behind him. "You didn't really think I'd hand over your wand without protection, did you?"

Sirius knew that any of the four behind Harry could kill him. "I'm not about to go back on my word."

"Once we've agreed on the terms of the duel, then they'll leave." Harry passed over Sirius' wand and pulled out his own. "I want a no-holds barred duel."

"Agreed." Sirius held out his hand again. "In that case I'd like my knives and my other wand."

Orion stepped forward and handed them over. "Black."

"You'll be back in the fold before you know it, Orion." Sirius took his weapons from his son. "I'm going to make certain of that."

"I'd rather die." Orion turned his back on the man he'd once loved more than anything else except for his mother and siblings.

Sirius knew that that wasn't going to happen if he won. "If I win, then I get to leave here unharmed."

Harry didn't need to look at Remus to know that he wasn't happy about the term. "Agreed."

"And I want witnesses." Sirius knew that he could use Harry's friends to his advantage.

"No." Harry snapped. "No witnesses."

"Agreed." Luna stepped forward; she'd looked up the rules of dueling the previous night and knew that she could include herself as a witness if she wanted to.

Dudley wasn't going to leave Luna alone. "Agreed."

Narcissa stepped forward as well. "Agreed." She turned to Draco. "Not you; I forbid it."

Draco scowled. He knew that he couldn't go against his mother's wishes in this type of situation.

Remus wished he'd stepped in to stop Dudley but could do nothing to prevent his attending now. He also stepped forward. "Agreed." If it looked as if Harry wasn't going to win, then he had every intention of sacrificing himself to kill Sirius.

Orion looked Sirius in the eye. "Agreed."

Sirius knew that Orion was the one witness he couldn't harm. "Agreed."

Harry knew he had little choice now. "Agreed."

Lily flew into the room just as everyone started to make their way up to the dueling room; she'd gotten delayed talking to Anna. Sirius stopped in front of his wife. "You might want to say goodbye to your son now."

"I'm coming to watch." Lily informed him.

“You can’t, Maman.” Harry pulled Lily into a hug. “We’ve already agreed on witnesses.”

Lily felt tears come to eyes. “Come back to me.”

Harry kissed her on the cheek. “I will, Mum.”

Lily burst into tears as Harry called her the one thing she’d always wanted to hear. Remus put an arm around Lily. “Please go sit with Nia. Grim’s practically had to lock her up in the sitting room.”

Nia had exploded when she’d found out what was in store for Harry and had spent most of the night crying. Harry had gone to see her before he’d left to meet with Remus. Grim had had to pull her off Harry to let him go.

Lily nodded and took one last look at Sirius, tears falling down her cheeks. “I hope you die a painful death, Sirius Black, and I wish I’d never set eyes on you.”

Sirius buried his hurt. “Likewise.” He then turned away so that no-one could see the tears that threatened at Lily’s words.

Draco stopped, and put his arm around a weeping Lily. “I’ll go with Aunt Lily. Harry, you can do this.”

Harry shook hands with Draco. “I’ll see you in a little while.”

Sirius ignored the sentiments and kept walking. Having spent a lot of time at the Potter Estate when he’d been friends with James, he knew exactly where the dueling room was.

Harry and his witnesses followed him up the stairs and into the room. Unlike Grimmauld Square, this room had windows on two of its four walls, making the room bright and sunny. Harry turned to the windows and pulled out his wand, closing and sealing the shutters. He didn’t want sunlight blinding him in the middle of the duel.

“A wise decision.” Sirius knew that only Harry could unseal the windows, and he used his own wand to light the candles that were

placed in sconces around the room including the large chandelier that hung from the center of the ceiling.

Harry hugged Remus for one last time. "If this is going badly, then get everyone out and somewhere safe."

"Don't worry, Harry. I'll do whatever it takes to ensure everyone's safety." Remus kissed Harry on the forehead. "Dae said to wish you good luck."

"I love you Dad." Harry stepped away and walked into the middle of the room.

Sirius knew that as he'd requested the witnesses, he also had to inform them as to what to expect. "As witnesses you cannot attack us but you can defend yourselves against attacks on your person and each other. If you do anything other than that then you'll die. You may leave the room at any time. Do you understand and agree?"

One by one each of them confirmed that they understood and agreed to the terms Sirius was setting out. Satisfied, Sirius moved to stand next to Harry. "We need to touch wands once more and then we can begin."

Harry did that and then marched to the allocated position before taking up a dueling stance. "I think we should bow and get on with it."

The two bowed and then faced off against each other. The moment Harry straightened he sent Dae's favorite curse hurtling towards Sirius who simply let the flame cutting curse hit him in the shoulder. "Reg's specialty isn't it?"

"I thought I'd honor the man who's spent the last three months getting me up to speed on you." Harry ducked as a petrification curse headed his way.

"I'm still going to beat you, Harry." Sirius laughed. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry dove to the left to avoid the curse. "I thought you'd play with me first rather than getting straight down to business. Minuo Maximus."

Sirius threw up a shield to dissipate the blood-letting curse. "Sectum Dexter."

Harry erected the strongest dispelling shield he could; he couldn't afford for that curse to hit anyone else. "Stealing my tricks, Sirius?"

"Why not? You've stolen enough of everyone else's." Sirius let Harry's next curse wash over him. "Like Dumbledore, my family ring has a few tricks as well." Sirius lowered his voice as he sent his next volley towards his foe.

Not knowing what Sirius had incanted, Harry had little choice except to put up an absorption shield as a spell he didn't recognize came his way; it was only as it hit his shield he realized why. It was a threefold curse; the first was a decapitating curse which his shield absorbed; the second a stunner which he managed to duck to avoid but the third hit him, and he dropped to the floor screaming as his flesh began to peel away from his neck and back.

Remus started to draw his wand. Narcissa put a hand over it. "Wait."

Sirius moved to stand over Harry. "Ouch. That must sting, Harry."

Harry had never felt pain quite like it but he also managed to keep his head. Drawing his knife from his boot he stuck it into Sirius' leg who immediately lost concentration; the spell fading away. Harry rolled back onto his feet and sent a stunner at Sirius who dropped to the floor and rolled away from Harry, pulling the knife out of his leg and throwing it towards Remus who caught it before placing it on the ground.

Firing off another petrification curse which missed, and unsure of what Sirius was going to hurl at him next, Harry erected a reflective shield just as a blasting spell suddenly hit it. Harry felt his shield shudder; he knew that Sirius was putting a lot of power in the spell. Unable to return fire while he held the shield up, he just hoped that Sirius wouldn't change tactics as Harry knew that his use of the threefold spell as well as injecting so much power into a blasting spell

would quickly start to tire Sirius out. Harry steeled himself as yet another blasting spell hit his shield.

Sirius gave a triumphant smile as his third blasting spell got through Harry's shield. Harry was blown backwards and into Narcissa, slamming them both hard against the wall. Harry shook his head as he tried to make sense of what had happened. Rolling off Narcissa, Harry placed a hand on her face as he saw blood trickling down through her hair. "Narcissa?"

Narcissa groaned. "I'm alright, Harry."

Harry climbed to his feet and faced Sirius. "I'm going to make you pay for that."

"You're going to die, Harry." Sirius' face was deadly serious. "But that's okay because Orion will take your place."

Harry snarled. "He'll never join you. The Dark Lord knows he opposes him."

"We'll see, won't we?" Sirius looked across to where his son was looking at him with disgust. "A little obliviation and my son's loyalties will be what they should have been."

Orion moved forward. "As I've already said, I'd rather die."

"You know that isn't going to happen." Sirius had no intention of killing his son and heir. "Now I think it's time we returned our attention to this duel." Sirius swiftly glanced around the room; he knew that Harry was hampered by the witnesses he'd demanded. "Reducto. Crucio."

Luna screamed as she was caught unawares by the spells that hit her in the shoulder knocking her to the ground.

At Luna's screams, something snapped inside of Harry and he went still for a few moments before lifting his head to look at Sirius; his eyes glistening ominously in the candlelight that lit the room. "I'm going to make you wish you'd never been born, Black."

Remus who'd bent down to pick up Narcissa, glanced over at the change in Harry's vocal tone. "Not now."

Harry sent a stunning spell at Sirius who had to drop the Cruciatus on Luna. "I want everyone out."

Sirius could feel the power that had suddenly begun to radiate off Harry. "They're going nowhere, Harry." Sirius flicked his wand at the door, sealing it. "Well, they can if they can get out."

Harry smiled eerily and held up his hand; the door unsealing itself and opening. "As I said, everyone can get out."

Remus pushed Orion towards the door. "Go and take Dudley and Luna with you."

"I'm not going anywhere." Luna struggled to her feet, Dudley's arm around her. "I'm staying to watch Harry finish him off."

"Then you're in for a very long wait." Sirius laughed and sent a spell which showered glass on everyone. Dudley threw up a shield protecting him and Luna, and Remus did the same for himself and Narcissa. Orion by then had made it out of the room.

Harry countered the spell and turned the glass into raindrops. "That's a little childish, Black."

"Let's up the ante then shall we?" Sirius let a dark yellow curse fly from his wand towards Harry. "Toxicum Talum Milia."

Harry rolled out of the way, and screamed out. "Get down."

Dudley threw himself on top of Luna but the darts weren't heading towards them. Standing directly behind Harry, Remus threw up a shield to try and stop the hundreds of tiny poisonous darts that were headed his way. As they impacted his reinforced shield, the darts dropped harmlessly to the floor. Remus could see that things were about to get uglier. "Narcissa, you're getting out of here."

Narcissa had little choice as Remus dragged her towards the exit, before literally throwing her out and warding the door to stop her from returning. On the other side of the room Dudley and Luna were too far away to reach the door safely.

"Two witnesses gone, three to go." Sirius smiled as Harry turned back to face him. "I'm enjoying this, Lupin."

"Not as much as I am, Black, and it's Potter." Harry took aim and sent a shot at Sirius. "Obscurum Dolor."

Sirius knew that there was little defense against the black cloud that was heading his way except for a reflective shield which he immediately invoked. While he was doing so, Harry sent another spell at Sirius. "Excrucio Maximus."

Sirius swore as he realized that his shield wouldn't hold the second spell out. The second the first spell hit his shield and started to move away, he quickly changed his shield to disperse Harry's pain spell, breathing a sigh of relief as he managed it. "You've learnt some new tricks since we last fought. Regulus has taught you well."

Harry shook his head, as he and Sirius circled each other. "Not Regulus; my father."

"I've never seen Remus use tricks like this." Sirius sent a wall of flames hurtling towards Harry.

"That's because I'm talking about Severus." Harry doused the flames with water.

"A pity he didn't think of employing a similar tactic when he was fighting me." Sirius let his next spell fly; this time heading towards Luna and Dudley. "Iuguolo."

Dudley knew the counter to this spell and used it. "Demulceo." The spell hit Dudley full in the face, but instead of ripping his throat open, it tickled him instead, making him laugh.

"Glad someone finds this funny." Harry snapped. "Decollo."

Sirius ducked as the beheading spell just missed him. "Another new notch on your belt, Lupin."

"Actually it's a very old notch, Black." Harry wished Sirius would just shut up and fight. "And as I've already said once, it's Potter, not Lupin."

"And I'm Lord Voldemort." Sirius sneered. "Minuo."

Harry easily batted the spell away. "It's true. Ask Remus."

Sirius who'd ignored Harry's comment about Severus being his father, was surprised at Harry's use of Remus' name. "What the fuck are you going on about?"

"He's not my son, Sirius." Remus kept a close eye on what was happening.

"You lied to me?" Sirius held off firing off another spell. "If this isn't Harry I'm fighting, then the duel is over and Harry's life is forfeit."

"What he's trying to tell you is that I am Harry but I'm not." Harry was enjoying seeing Sirius' confused look. "Do you remember when you tried Legilimency on your Harry and the very peculiar memory you saw of yourself?"

"Of course." Sirius decided that it was time to carry on with the duel and that Harry was simply playing with him. "Avada Kedavra. Avada Kedavra. Avada Kedavra."

Harry didn't get a chance to finish what he was going to say to Sirius as he hit the floor rolling out of the way time and time again as Sirius repeatedly sent the killing curse towards him.

"Stupefy." Sirius hadn't expected Harry to be able to get off a spell as Sirius believed he'd got Harry on the defensive, which was his undoing, and as Harry's spell hit him, he slumped unconscious to the ground. Harry climbed to his feet. "It's always the simple ones that get them."

Remus walked over. "Aren't you going to kill him?"

"Not yet." Harry smiled; it was a cold merciless smile without any warmth. "I'm going to have some fun first."

Remus knew he couldn't interfere but he wanted to find something out. "You are the other Harry, aren't you?"

Harry nodded. "I don't know what happened but I suddenly found myself here."

"What was the last thing you remember?" Remus stepped aside as Harry kicked Sirius' wand across the room towards Luna and Dudley, who were both sensible enough to leave it where it was.

"A flash of green light and falling." Harry disarmed Sirius of his other wand and knives. "But I'm also aware of everything your Harry knows. I don't know how or why but I am."

Luna walked over, Dudley's arm around her waist. "Your spell went wrong, Harry."

"I guessed that." Harry couldn't help but stare at the young woman who so closely resembled his dead wife. "I should have merged with your Harry and not have been able to converse like this if it had worked. Excuse me." Harry flicked his wand and chains shot out from the floor to hold Sirius by his arms and legs. "I wouldn't want him waking up and surprising me while we talk."

"May I?" Harry looked at Luna's shoulder. Luna nodded and Harry cast a spell on it. "That should hold you until you can get something done to it; it's just a field dressing."

"Thanks." Luna rotated her shoulder; while still bloody it wasn't painful anymore. "You know what went wrong with the spell don't you?"

"I was supposed to have let Mione bleed out but I couldn't do it." Harry sighed. "She was one of the last things I had left; I couldn't do it to her."

"I'm glad you didn't." Luna admitted. "Our Harry has had a far better life than you ever appeared to."

Harry looked Dudley over. "You're so different from the Dudley I knew. He'd have held me down while Sirius beat me."

"I know." Harry had told Dudley about his alter ego. "Harry explained it to me a few weeks ago; he finally managed to view all of your memories."

"Which is why I think I can access all of his." Harry theorized.

Remus thought about Hermione. "If you have Harry's memories, then you'll know about Hermione. Is there anything you can think of from your alternate timeline that could help her?"

Harry immediately shook his head. "I'm afraid not. So far as I know if you mess around with a pureblood duel then you're as good as dead."

Luna's face fell. "It was worth a try."

Harry put a hand on Luna's good shoulder. "I'm sorry about your friend but there really is nothing you can do." He then turned to Remus and Dudley. "Do you two mind if I speak to Luna alone?"

Dudley did mind but after knowing what he did, he couldn't begrudge the young man who'd made his life what it was, five minutes with his girlfriend. "We'll be outside."

Luna watched as Remus and Dudley left. "What is it you want, Harry?"

"I know that you know all about my Luna, and how I felt about her." Harry tentatively lifted a hand but didn't touch Luna. "Do you have any idea how difficult it is for me just to stand here and not touch you?"

"I can't say that I do because I don't." Luna was mesmerized by Harry's eyes that seemed to bore into her very soul. "Why did you ask to speak to me alone?"

"Because I have a favor to ask of you." Harry wanted to hold her one more time; he didn't know whether he'd ever see her again or be himself like this after her Harry came back.

"If I can grant it, then I will." Luna wondered what he wanted.

"I'd like to hold you, just once." Harry waited for Luna's answer.

Luna held out her arms and Harry slipped into them, holding her close, burying his face into her hair. He couldn't believe how much she felt and smelt like his Luna. "Oh Merlin."

Luna felt a shudder go through Harry, and tears came to her eyes as she realized how hard this was for him.

Harry finally lifted his head; he had one more favor to ask of her. "Luna, you don't have to say yes, but may I kiss you?"

Under normal circumstances, Luna would have refused, but looking at the almost desperate need in Harry's eyes, she swallowed nervously and nodded her agreement.

At her acquiescence, Harry slid his hand into Luna's hair and covered her lips with his own. Wrapping his arm more tightly around her waist, Harry deepened the kiss when Luna relaxed and allowed him access to her mouth. Unable to believe that he could share this moment with her, Harry kissed her again and again, the kisses becoming more and more passionate as Harry lost himself. Harry moaned, and let his hand slide to Luna's bottom, continuing to kiss her unrelentingly, taking everything she offered until suddenly he gasped and released Luna's mouth. "Oh Merlin, Luna. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean for that to happen."

Luna simply smiled, and continued to hold Harry, who she could feel shaking. "I understand, Harry."

Harry let his forehead rest on Luna's before kissing the top of her head and reluctantly letting her go. "I hope Dudley makes you happy."

"He does, Harry. Unbelievably so." Luna then changed the subject. "I think you have something to finish."

Harry pulled his wand back out. "I suggest you leave, Luna. This isn't going to be pleasant. I'm going to be sealing the door and once I do you will not be able to leave again until this over."

Luna shook her head. "I'm going to stay. I'm not your Luna but I know she wouldn't leave you, and therefore neither will I."

Harry closed his eyes as tears threatened at Luna's sentiment. "Thank you. In that case, please keep your distance; I don't want you getting hurt." Harry aimed his wand at the door. "Obfirmo Recedo Harry Remus Lupin-Potter."

Luna watched as the door sealed itself and blended in with the wall. She knew that only their Harry could now open it again.

Harry stepped over to Sirius and enervated him. "Wakey, wakey."

Sirius groaned as he realized that he'd lost. "Well done, Harry. I always knew you had it in you."

"As you really don't know me, you can't say that." Harry folded his arms as looked down on the man who'd caused so many people so much pain.

"So you're still going on about that bullshit about not being Harry." Sirius snarled.

"It's not bullshit, Black." Harry knelt down. "And I'm going to prove it to you. But first I'm going to treat you to a little game." Harry laughed nastily. "As I've seen from your Harry's memories, you enjoy playing games, don't you?"

Sirius couldn't move and simply lay there. "So what does big bad Harry think he can do to scare me?"

"Plenty, Black. But first I think I a little payback for what you did to Luna is needed." Harry aimed his wand at Sirius' shoulder. "Reducto."

Sirius bit back a scream as a hole appeared in his shoulder. "Well that tickled."

"Not as much as this is going to." Harry let his disgust and anger at this Sirius flow through his wand. "Crucio."

Sirius writhed within the confines of the chains as Harry unrelentingly let him suffer, before dropping the spell. It didn't take Sirius too long to recover. "You're going to have to do better than that, Harry."

"I'm going to, Black. Now, I want to hear to you beg for mercy like your brother did when you hung him over the cliff before dropping him." Harry grabbed Sirius' hair and pulled his head back. "How many teeth do you think I'll have to pull before you start to beg?"

Sirius didn't even flinch. "I'll never beg."

"Oh but you will." Harry sat back on his heels. "Extracto Dens Singulus." He then waited for Sirius to beg as one by one his teeth were forcibly removed.

Even though he screamed, Sirius didn't utter a single word. Sirius then laughed defiantly despite his pain. "You've never going to be able to do it."

"So that wasn't painful enough. What can I do next?" Harry stood up.

"I can take whatever you throw at me." Sirius sneered as Harry circled him.

"It's a shame you're not a werewolf." Harry knew plenty of painful things that affected them. "But you are a man, and I think it only fitting that you be punished for what you did to Virginie Snape."

Sirius spat out a mouthful of blood at Harry, who jumped aside. "You don't have the guts."

"Your Harry might not have, but I most definitely have." Harry warned Sirius.

"Just cut the crap, Harry." Sirius couldn't believe Harry was still messing with him. "You've beaten me so there's no need to keep up the 'I'm a different Harry' bullshit."

Harry sat down and crossed his legs. "Let me enlighten you, Black. I'm truly a different Harry. I travelled back through time to when the Dark Lord attacked your Harry's birth parents. James and Lily Potter – you remember them don't you? Of course you do, seeing as you couldn't wait to steal James' wife before he was even cold in his grave."

Sirius' face indicated his disbelief. "There's no way to do that, and Lily didn't exactly put up a fight."

Harry ignored the comment about Lily. "But there is a way to do it. However, I couldn't kill a friend so the spell went wrong leaving my memories intact when they should have merged with your Harry's." Harry informed him. "If things had gone right, then you shouldn't have been like this. In my timeline you were a good man, Black. My Sirius cared enough about me to die for me. He fell through a veil that is kept in the Department of Mysteries."

Sirius didn't bother to hide his shock. "How do you know about the veil?"

"Because as I've told already you, I'm not the Harry you think I am." Harry sighed and got up. "With no-one to beg for her life, the Lily Potter in my timeline died to save me, providing me with blood protection against Voldemort as long as I resided with a family member of her bloodline. For fourteen miserable years I lived with my fucking disgusting relatives. However, I didn't have a twin brother to share the experience with me."

“So what?” Sirius spat again to stop himself from choking on the blood that was still seeping out from the unorthodox extractions Harry had performed.

“In my timeline, I was the Boy Who Lived.” Harry trod on Sirius’ fingers making them crunch under the heel of his boot. “That’s for what you did to Severus.” Harry then deliberately ground his heel in as hard as he could making Sirius scream out. “Where was I? Oh yes. The Boy Who Lived. Guess what, Sirius. Jamie’s not the Boy Who Lived, Harry is.”

“I don’t believe you.” Sirius gasped out as he struggled to cope with the pain of Harry’s weight on his broken hand.

“Harry speaks parseltongue; a parting gift from Voldemort from their encounter, and Jamie doesn’t. Harry’s far more powerful than Jamie, and finally, like me, Harry suffers terrible pain whenever he’s close to the Dark Lord; Jamie doesn’t.” Harry informed him as he stepped off Sirius’ hand and wondered what he could do next to him.

“He’s never once suffered pain in front of the Dark Lord.” Sirius denied the final part of Harry’s claims.

“Oh but he has.” Harry walked round and put his boot onto Sirius’ throat. “Do you remember when you offered him the position as your apprentice, and how he sweated when the Dark Lord came in?”

Sirius thought back. “That was fear.”

“No, it wasn’t.” Harry increased the pressure slightly. “That was pain. He’s just gotten better at dealing with it thanks to you and your ‘gentle’ methods.”

Sirius couldn’t respond as Harry was starting to cut off his airway.

Harry released him. “Before I finish you off, I believe the correct form is to ask if you have any last requests.”

Sirius knew then that he wasn’t going to get out of alive. “I suppose a glass of scotch is out of the question.”

“Pasha.” Harry knew the house-elf would be able to bypass his sealing off the door. “A glass of scotch for the scum on the floor. I’ll have a large glass of firewhiskey.”

Pasha returned with the requested drinks before disappearing again.

Harry swallowed his firewhiskey before walking over with the glass of scotch, and pouring it over Sirius’ face. “Enjoy your scotch.”

Sirius swore. “That wasn’t fucking nice.”

“You didn’t request that you wanted to drink it; just that you wanted a glass of scotch. Whoops. I almost forgot the glass.” Harry dropped the glass, not bothering to hide glee as it impacted Sirius’ cheekbone and shattered, ripping a large gash in Sirius’ face just below his eye. “That’s also for Severus; a pity it didn’t take your eye. Now to get back to that retribution that’s owed to Virginie.”

Sirius started to sweat a little. “As I said, you don’t have the guts.”

“Let me tell you a little something about me. When I found out that Wormtail had raped my wife, who in my timeline was Luna, I carried out my threat with a knife.” Harry didn’t bother to walk across the room to pick up the knife that had been used previously on Sirius, and he pulled out the ribbon that was holding his hair back and transfigured it into a large hunting knife. “As I’ve already done it once, I have no problem doing it again.”

Sirius was by now beginning to believe Harry but wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of knowing that. “You don’t scare me.”

“Maybe, maybe not.” Harry slid the knife into Sirius’ shoulder where he’d made the hole earlier making Sirius buck but even then he didn’t cry out.

Despite of the discomfort he was in, Sirius smirked at Harry. “I said you didn’t have the guts.”

“Oh but I do. However, as there’s a lady present in this room, I’m going to be a gentleman and do it with a spell instead.” Harry aimed his wand. “Lente Castro.”

Luna watched silently; hiding her horror at the cruelty this Harry was displaying. She knew that their Harry would have been unable to go that far.

As the spell did its work, Sirius’ screams ripped through the room. Harry felt his heart quicken as the feeling of power and dominance surged through him. “I think we’d better stop the bleeding. I don’t want to you die too quickly.”

Through a haze of pain, Sirius recognized the action as being similar to the one he’d carried out on his brother. “Nice touch.”

“Before I put an end to your miserable life, I think you should experience a little of the skin stripping experience you put your Harry through earlier.” Harry cast the spell and watched in satisfied pleasure as Sirius began to contort and scream.

After five minutes of losing strip after strip of skin, Sirius eventually gave in and, sobbing, began to plead with Harry. “For fuck’s sake, stop it.”

Harry stood over Sirius, his eyes now pure black, energy crackling around him. “I told you I’d make you beg.”

Sirius now couldn’t speak for sobbing as Harry let the spell continue its gruesome work. “What’s wrong, Black? Nothing to say? No regrets; no words of remorse for what you’ve done?”

As Sirius was beyond words, Harry ended the spell and Sirius’ sobs began to die down as the pain started to lessen. Harry stood up. “I really should string this out a little longer; make you pay for what you’ve done to Harry’s wife.”

Sirius frowned; now that the pain had abated somewhat he was able to speak again. “Wife?”

“Hermione’s his wife, Black.” Harry grabbed Sirius’ hair again. “If she hadn’t have been, then you’d have simply been executed the minute Severus accepted your surrender. Harry wants to kill you himself.”

“If you’re here, then he’s not going to get the chance.” Sirius had the satisfaction of knowing that.

Harry knew he was right, and walked over to Luna. “I need Harry back to finish this.”

Luna thought back to previous incidents. “He usually comes out of it after he’s slept for a while.”

“I know but I don’t have that kind of time.” Harry thought for a moment. “I’ve an idea. Make sure Black is dead before you try and get that horcrux. The spell to check is Resoro Anima. If the cloud above him is black, then he’s dead.” Harry then took one last look at Luna before turning his wand on himself. “Somnio Brevus.”

Luna watched as Harry slumped to the floor. She walked over to Sirius. “How does it feel, Black? To know that when he wakes up, your life will be at end?”

“If he has the guts to do it.” Sirius had accepted his tormentor's story about being a different Harry but he still wasn't convinced that the Harry he knew would be able to follow through. “Is it true about Snape’s brat?”

“If you’re talking about Hermione, then yes, it is.” Luna informed him.

Sirius smirked. “At least I get the satisfaction of knowing that she’ll die as well.”

“No she won’t.” Luna lied. “We’ve found a counter for the spell. Hermione will be just fine in a day or two.”

Sirius couldn’t tell if Luna was telling the truth or not. “Pity; the world would have been better off without her.”

Luna knew that Sirius was trying to goad her into attacking him, and stepped back. "Funny, I was about to say the same about you."

Across the room, Harry groaned and woke up. "What happened?"

Luna hurried over to him. "Sirius put me under the Cruciatus and the other Harry came through. Harry, he's made quite a mess of Sirius, but he wanted you to inflict the final blow. Harry, he's put a spell on him to stop Sirius bleeding out so he could torture him some more."

Harry couldn't hide his disgust at what his alternate self had done as he looked down at Sirius. "Oh Merlin. I don't know if I can do this."

"You're a bloody coward, Lupin." Sirius taunted him. "At least that other Harry had some guts which is more than I can say for you."

Luna put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "The fact that Harry finds it hard to kill someone in cold blood despite what they've done to him doesn't make him a coward; quite the opposite in fact."

"Whatever." Sirius snarled, and stared at Harry. "If you act like this when you have to face the Dark Lord, you're going to end up dead; just like your wife."

"My wife is not going to die." Harry snapped. "I'm going to do whatever it takes to save her."

Sirius sneered at Luna. "Nice try with the lies, bitch." He then turned to Harry. "Let me go and we'll finish this properly."

Luna could see that Harry didn't want to kill Sirius in cold blood. "Harry, you can't release him. He wouldn't do the same for you."

Harry hated himself for having morals. "Erect a shield, Luna."

Luna could have slapped Harry for his stupidity but moved away and did as he asked. "You've got to finish this, Harry."

Harry released Sirius and threw him a wand. "Get up, Black."

Sirius healed his mouth and applied the same temporary field dressings on himself as the other Harry had done to Luna. "I'm ready."

"Reducto." Harry sent the curse flying at Sirius who simply batted it away, before returning the same spell. Harry easily avoided it.

"Avada Kedavra." Sirius sent the killing curse at Harry; he knew that he had to end it quickly as he was aware of how much blood he'd already lost, and he was already feeling weak and dizzy.

Harry rolled out of the way, and transformed, leaping towards Sirius and knocking him over. Sirius' wand went flying across the room as Harry sank his teeth into Sirius' throat before getting off him and re-taking human shape again. He then placed the same suspension spell on Sirius that the other Harry had as well as refitting the chains. "Any last wishes?"

Sirius struggled to speak. "I've already had them denied."

"What do you want?" Harry asked.

"I'd like the scotch your counterpart should have given me." Sirius knew that this Harry wouldn't react the same way.

"Pasha." Harry called out. "Can you fetch me a scotch?"

The house-elf dutifully got yet another glass of scotch and Harry released one of Sirius' hands so that he could drink it; keeping his wand trained on Sirius while he did so.

Sirius swallowed the scotch, sighing as he felt it go down. "You could have been so much more than you are, Harry."

"The price was too high for me." Harry didn't let his eyes waver as the glass refilled and Sirius continued to drink.

"Even if you kill me, you do know that your side is still going to lose, don't you?" Sirius still believed that the Dark Lord would win. "You're

going to lose everything. Your parents, your wife, your friends, and inevitably your life."

"Something I'm willing to sacrifice if it means an end to Voldemort." Harry knew that it might come to that.

Sirius looked over at Luna. "And a pretty little thing like that will become a plaything for my Master's men."

Luna shook her head. "I'd kill myself first."

"Either way we win." Sirius laughed, wincing as pain shot through his throat. He smirked at Harry, knowing that he'd get the satisfaction of knowing how much his next comments would irk Harry. "I hope the Dark Lord lets you live long enough to see his men have their fun with her. And just think Harry, she won't be alone. You've got three lovely sisters as well for them to enjoy. I know they'll enjoy Lily; she's a tiger in the sack but I can't say the same for your adoptive mother; she's a little scrawny and long in the tooth, but I'm sure she'll make good werewolf fodder."

Sirius' words pushed Harry over the edge. "Fuck you. I would have used the killing curse on you but instead you can bleed out slowly just like you intended for Severus. Finite incantatum totalus." Harry vanished the glass and resecured Sirius' hand before walking away to let Sirius die slowly. He then cast silencio as Sirius continued to make crude remarks.

Harry sank to the ground, and started to cry from the sheer relief of knowing it was over. Luna slid her arm around his waist and leant up against his back murmuring softly to him. The two sat like that for a while until Harry wiped his face and looked over to where Sirius was now unmoving; blood pooling around him. "Do you think he's dead?"

Luna handed Harry his wand which he'd placed on the ground beside him. "The spell to check is Resoro Anima."

Harry went to stand over Sirius and incanted the spell Luna had given him; a black cloud rising above Sirius before dissipating. "What does that mean?"

"That he's definitely dead." Luna trusted that the other Harry had known what he was going on about. "Harry, I know you probably don't feel like this but we need that horcrux."

Harry lifted his wand only for Luna to knock it out of his hand. "Don't. What if your vow not to bear arms against him is still in existence even though he's dead?"

"Do you really think it might be?" Harry hadn't thought about it.

Luna took a deep breath. "Let me. *Aduro Concremo*."

She then stepped back, pulling Harry with her as fire leapt from her wand and engulfed Sirius' body. "Wow, that's hot." As the fire consumed Sirius' body, Luna thought about how Sirius should have turned out if the other Harry's spell hadn't gone wrong. "Ashes to ashes, Black. I hope you find some peace in the afterlife."

Harry held Luna as he waited for the fire to die down. When it ended, only ashes remained. After casting a spell to reveal any items that had survived the fire, Harry picked up the jewelry the spell revealed, wincing as his hand brushed against Sirius' wedding band. "I think I've found what we're looking for." He quickly slipped it into his pocket, not wanting to handle it too much.

"Harry, I think we've found something else as well." Luna nudged him as a small head appeared amongst the ashes.

"Fawkes!" Harry was shocked to see the tiny vulnerable bird. "I wondered what happened to you."

Luna conjured up a hat and gently scooped the small bird into it together with some of Sirius' ashes. "Sirius must have entrapped Fawkes somehow. I wonder why he was carrying Fawkes around with him."

"Perhaps he needed close proximity for the spell to be effective." Harry cringed at Luna's casual way of dealing with the ashes. "We'll probably never know now." Harry unsealed the door and the two

headed out, both being engulfed by hugs the moment they stepped into the hallway.

Meanwhile

Dae left Remus, trying not to think about what Sirius had told him, and headed for his room to wash up and change his clothing, feeling unclean after he'd spoken to Sirius. He'd decided to infiltrate Hogwarts disguised as a Death Eater. Making his way down to the breakfast room, he grabbed a slice of toast, smiling to the children who were crowded around the now enlarged table, while scanning Scarlett and Cassie's schedule. Putting it down, he headed off to speak to Nia and Lily before he went.

Five minutes later, Auri wandered into the breakfast room. She'd been unable to eat as she knew that Harry was fighting Sirius, and her stomach was tied up in knots. Looking round she didn't spot Dae who'd she wanted to wish good luck to. Looking down at the table she spotted the girls' schedule. "He's forgotten it."

Theo ended his conversation with Isobella. "Who's forgotten what?"

"Dae. He's forgotten the girls' schedule." Auri span round. "I'll try and catch him."

Theo went back to discussing defensive spells with Isobella as Auri ran out of the room and towards the room in the Potter Estate set aside for inward and outward travel.

In the room, Dae knew he had just moments before the portkey went off. Picking up the white mask, he slipped it into his pocket as Auri careened into the room, her stocking feet slipping as she struggled for purchase on the marble floor. Auri yelped as she lost her footing and smashed into Dae just as the portkey activated. A moment later the room was empty.

Next Chapter: It might be a week or so before this appears as school is starting again.

Chapter 71: Return to Hogwarts

Hogwarts

Seville stretched and got out of bed wincing; the curse that she'd been hit with had been extremely painful. She looked over as Anna opened the door. "What happened to me?"

Anna had put a ward on Seville's room to let her know when she awoke. "Use the bathroom and come straight back here. A lot's gone on since you were injured."

Seville used the bathroom before returning to sit down as Anna filled her in on what had occurred while she'd been out of things. "Jamie must have been coerced, Anna."

Anna shook her head. "I'm sorry, Seville but there's absolutely no chance of that."

Seville dropped her face into her hands and struggled not to cry. Lifting her head up, she met Anna's comforting gaze. "What's going to happen now?"

"I'm waiting to hear from Dae or Harry. But until we do, you're going to have to play along. We're the only connection to Voldemort left in the school that I'd trust." Anna put her arm around Seville. "Can you do it?"

Seville determinedly nodded her head. "I can." She thought of something she hadn't asked. "What happened to whoever attacked me?"

"I had no choice, Seville. There were too many witnesses." Anna closed her eyes as she thought of what she'd had to do. "I had to hand them over to your father."

"Who was it?" Seville asked nervously.

Anna knew that her words were going to hurt Seville. "Ronald Prewett and your brother."

Seville's face reflected the horror she felt. "I know Neville wouldn't have done something like that."

"He didn't cast the curse but he was with Prewett when he did, and he made no attempt to defend you." Anna told her.

"I need to speak my father." Seville started to pull off her nightclothes.

"They're probably already dead." Anna admitted. "It's been three days now."

"I don't care." Seville pulled out fresh underwear and ran into the bathroom. "I have to try."

A few minutes later she came out and finished dressing. "Can I floo from your office?"

"I'll take you." Anna offered. "I can't let you go there on your own."

Seville held out her hand to Anna who wrapped her arm around the girl and apparated them both into the rooms that Seville had at Villa Laurifer.

"I'll come with you to see your father." Anna was glad that they didn't need to wear masks.

Voldemort opened his own door to find his daughter and her guardian waiting outside. "Come in."

Anna bowed. "My Lord."

Seville ignored the pleasantries and stalked into the room. "Is Neville still alive?"

"Yes." Voldemort hadn't killed him yet as he knew that Seville might be upset if he had without talking to her first. "I determined that he wasn't the ringleader in the attack against you."

“And Ronald Prewett?” Seville could hear the nerves in her voice as she didn’t expect to get such a positive outcome from her father about Ron.

“He was the ringleader, and as such he’s been dealt with appropriately.” Voldemort didn’t tell her that he’d tortured himself before finally killing him. “I also found out that this wasn’t the first time he’d attacked you.”

“It wasn’t.” Seville knew she might as well be honest now that she correctly surmised that Ron was dead. “If it wasn’t for Harry and Georgie, I think Prewett would have hurt me when he first found out about me. What I don’t understand is why he didn’t just attack me when there was no-one around.”

“Harry wasn’t the only one who thought he could lead a group to victory against me.” Voldemort had ripped the information from Ron’s mind. “Prewett had organized a band of students who weren’t very happy with their situation.”

“Who are they?” Anna knew that it was her duty to deal with them.

“That doesn’t matter at the moment.” Voldemort took Seville’s hand in his own. “I can’t allow your brother to live; he was part of the group who dared to oppose me.”

“Please don’t kill him.” Seville begged for Neville’s life. “I know he’s a traitor but I still care about him.”

“Very well.” Voldemort decided to acquiesce to Seville’s request. “But don’t expect any preferential treatment for him.”

“Can I see him?” Seville needed to see how Neville was faring.

“If you must.” Voldemort turned to Anna. “Your arm.”

Anna gritted her teeth as Voldemort pressed his wand into the blemish that constituted his brand.

A few minutes later Callide was leading Seville away.

Voldemort turned to Anna. "I'm glad to see my daughter has recovered. I don't expect anything like this to happen again."

"I'm sorry, my Lord." Anna waited for the punishment she expected for failing.

"I'm willing to let it slide this time as you defended Seville against Harry when he tried to take her." Voldemort knew that his lack of action would surprise Anna. "But I want you to make an example of those who would resist me. I expect the pupils who led this uprising to be lined up and waiting my arrival tonight at dinner. You will then kill them to demonstrate how such a mutiny against me is to be dealt with."

Anna knew that this was her true punishment. "Of course, my Lord."

After filling Anna in on whom he expected her to punish, Voldemort decided to pass the time while they waited for Seville in a more sociable manner. He walked over to where he kept his chess set. "Do you play?"

"I'm fairly good at it." Anna admitted.

"Sit down." Voldemort ordered. "We'll play a game while we wait for Seville to return."

Callide led Seville down to the very bowels of the house and into the dungeons. She used her wand to open a door. "He's in there."

Seville lit her wand and gasped at the swollen face of her brother. "Neville."

"Get away from me." Neville backed away from her. "I want nothing to do with you."

"Please, Nev." Seville was upset at the sight of Neville's face. "I've asked Lord Voldemort to spare your life."

“How generous.” Neville snarled. “You’ve done your charitable thing; now go.”

“Why did you do it?” Seville was hurt at Neville’s rejection of her.

“Does it matter?” Neville didn’t move.

“Yes.” Seville had to know why Neville, who’d said that he still loved her even though he didn’t want anything to do with her, had been a party to injuring her.

“I didn’t know that Ron was going to do that.” Neville admitted. “I thought he was just going to stun you and take you captive.”

“Which is why he wasn’t bothered about there being witnesses, isn’t it?” Seville asked.

“He was supposed to portkey you out, not attack you.” Neville sat down on the small bed.

“So why did he change his mind?” Seville didn’t dare approach her brother.

“I don’t know.” Neville had an idea though. “But I think he might have seen himself as some sort of hero if he killed you.”

“I’ll do what I can for you.” Seville offered, even though she knew that Voldemort would refuse.

“I don’t want your help.” Neville turned his back on her. “Now get out.”

Seville felt like crying. “Please Nev.”

“Just fuck off.” Neville turned his back on his sister.

Callide put her hand on Seville’s shoulder. “It’s time to go.”

Seville let Callide lead her away.

Forbidden Forest

Dae couldn't believe it. "What the bloody hell were you playing at, Auri?"

"You forgot the girls' schedule." Auri held up the piece of paper in her hand.

"I'd memorized it." Dae snatched the piece of paper out of her hand. "Now come here; I'm going to have to apparate you back."

Auri went to step towards him when voices drifted their way. "Someone's coming."

"Get down and stay down." Dae dropped down beside Auri as Hannah Abbott and Ginny Prewett came into view. "Now what are they doing out here when they should have been in classes?" Dae answered his own question and could have kicked himself as he suddenly realized that with three teachers missing, some of the classes had probably been cancelled; the schedule Auri had tried to bring him was probably worthless.

Auri watched through the bushes as the two girls sat down on a log together. "I'm glad Jamie told me about you."

Ginny smiled at Hannah. "It's good to know I'm not the only girl. I believe Bulstrode is a Death Eater but I'd hardly qualify her as a human being, let alone a girl."

Hannah giggled. "I know what you mean." She played with her hair for a moment before cocking her head sideways. "I'm sorry about your brother and Blaise."

"Don't be." Ginny had been upset when she'd first found out about them but she wasn't going to appear soft to the girl in front of her. "I'm not."

Hannah was a little dismayed at Ginny's callous dismissal of the two young men, and she hurriedly changed the subject. "What do you think of Jamie?"

Ginny narrowed her eyes. "Please don't tell me you've got some sort of crush on him."

"He is pretty cute." Hannah had liked Jamie for some time.

"Well I'd forget about any aspirations you might have in that direction." Ginny warned her. "You know very well that he's dating the Dark Lord's daughter. Even if you were the prettiest and richest girl in school, that would be hard to beat."

"I know." Hannah sighed. "But you never know what might happen."

"I can tell you now even if something did, you'd unlikely be anything more than a passing fling." Ginny couldn't believe that Hannah was mooning after Jamie. "Believe me, I know."

"You and Jamie have?" Hannah was dismayed.

"No, but not for want of trying on my part." Ginny admitted. "He turned me down flat."

"Wow." Hannah knew that if someone as pretty as Ginny hadn't gotten anywhere, then she stood no chance. "He must really like Seville."

"Or the power that comes with being her boyfriend." Ginny stood up. "Come on, let's get back."

Before they could leave, Scarlett and Cassie came running over the hill. Ginny groaned. "I'm definitely going now. That pair hate me."

"Leave it to me." Hannah walked up to the girls. "Hello there. What are you doing?"

"Looking for Jamie." Cassie was uncomfortable around Ginny, and her furtive glances at the girl showed it. "Malfoy said he might be out here."

"I think he's in the library but I'm not entirely sure." Hannah had no idea where he was. "Can I help you instead?"

"We wanted to know if we could borrow Jamie's broom for some quidditch practice." Both Cassie and Scarlett were quidditch mad. "But if he's not around, I can't exactly wander into the Head Boy's suite and take it."

"Come with me and we can go get it." Hannah offered. "Scarlett, wait here and talk to Ginny. She's in the same position Jamie and I are in if you catch my drift."

In the bushes Dae turned to Auri. "Stay here, and whatever you do, don't move. I'm going to follow Cassie; I can deal with Abbott at the same time."

Auri felt her stomach flop over. "You won't kill her will you?"

"Not unless she tries to kill me." Dae could see that the thought unsettled Auri. "Now wait here and I'll be back as soon as I can."

Auri had to smother her snort of laughter as Dae transformed into a small black hamster. She turned her attention back to Ginny who was chatting to Scarlett about quidditch.

Ginny had chosen the one topic she knew that Scarlett would be likely to open up to her about. "So what position do you want to play in?"

"Seeker, like my brother." Scarlett didn't really want to talk to the girl but didn't want to be rude.

Everyone in the school now knew that Harry had been Alumno. "Amicus' former favorite." Ginny smirked. "He kind of fell from grace didn't he?"

"He was doing what he thought was right." Scarlett snapped. "I thought you were in the same position as Hannah and Jamie. You don't sound like it."

"I'm sorry; I'm just on edge after everything that has happened. I've just lost my brother and my fiance has disappeared." Ginny hid her

smirk in a handkerchief as she pretended to sniffle. "If the Dark Lord finds out about Jamie, Hannah and I, our lives won't be worth a knut."

Scarlett felt bad. "I'm really sorry. Don't worry you can trust me and Cassie."

"I'm glad to hear it." Ginny pretended to wipe her eyes before looking over to the quidditch pitch. "Let's head up that way and wait for them to come back. I'll show you a few moves when they do."

In the trees above the group, no-one had spotted the black raven that had listened to the conversation with amusement. Jamie now knew how to manipulate Hannah as well as Ginny if necessary, but right now he had other concerns. Flying silently down from the tree he landed before transforming right behind Auri. "Imperio."

Auri listened to the voice telling her what to do before darkness claimed her as Jamie stunned her.

Dae scurried as fast he could towards the school. Once inside he immediately transformed and hurried after Hannah and Cassie.

Cassie smiled at Hannah as the girl passed her Jamie's broom. "Thanks."

"It's no problem." Hannah span round as the door flew open and a white-masked man stood there. "Just what do you think you're doing?"

"Stupefy." Dae knocked her out and shut the door, making Cassie recoil. "Cassie, I'm not here to hurt you."

Cassie held her wand up. "I don't believe you."

"Hannah's a Death Eater." Dae kept his distance.

"I know." Cassie informed him. "But so are you, so why are you telling me that?"

Dae realized he still had his mask on and pulled it off, letting it drop to the floor. "See, it's just me."

Cassie still wasn't sure if she could trust her Professor. "What are you going to do to us?"

Dae turned his wand on Hannah. "I swear I'm just going to enervate her to get the truth out of her."

"Okay." Cassie was frightened and confused.

Dae enervated Hannah who immediately felt for her wands. "I shouldn't bother; I've disarmed you. I want you to tell Cassie the truth."

"I don't know what you mean." Hannah denied everything.

"Imperio." Dae didn't have time to mess around. "I want you to answer my questions truthfully. Do you understand?"

Cassie watched anxiously as Hannah's voice took on a dazed sound. "I understand."

"Did you take the Dark Mark freely?" Dae questioned.

"Yes." Hannah told him.

"Why?" Dae knew that he'd gotten through to Cassie with the first question but he still wanted to ensure that Cassie was totally convinced.

"Because I believe the Dark Lord will be victorious, and I wanted to be on the winning side." Hannah admitted.

"Stupefy." Dae let her fall to the floor again. If Cassie hadn't been there he knew that he would probably have killed Hannah. "Cassie, you need to come with me. Auri's outside in the Forest waiting for us."

"You brought my cousin?" Cassie couldn't believe Dae would risk Auri's life like that.

"There was a minor incident and she ended up portkeying with me. I didn't have time to apparate back as Abbott and Prewett turned up." Dae passed Cassie a small stone, and a slip of paper. "This is the portkey and directions how to find Harry. I want you to grab Scarlett when we get back down to the quidditch pitch. I'll activate it once you get hold of her and don't trust Prewett, she's a Death Eater as well. I'll deal with Prewett and get Auri and apparate her back." Dae knew he had to warn Cassie as he had no idea of what had happened in the duel since he'd left before it had finished. "Cassie, you might find that everyone is getting to leave when you reach your destination or that they've gone. If that's the case, don't panic, just wait for me."

"Okay." Cassie read the piece of paper which told her that Harry Lupin could be found at the Potter Estate before slipping the stone into her pocket. "Do you need your mask?"

Dae picked it up from the floor. "I need to see Anna before we go."

Cassie frowned. "Professor, she serves You-Know-Who as well."

"Anna doesn't. She's just pretending." Dae had decided that Remus was right and that Sirius had just been playing with him.

"You can pretend to be escorting me for doing something wrong." Cassie suggested, her fears allayed by Dae's reassurances.

Dae smiled at the girl's quick thinking. "Let's go."

Cassie marched towards the headmistress' office, Dae's hand on her shoulder, only to find the gargoyles blocking the way. "I don't know the password."

"Neither do I." Dae scowled. "Anna would have opened the entrance if she'd been there. It will have to wait."

Cassie followed Dae back to the entrance. He turned to her. "I'm going to transform into my animagus form, so go slowly back down to the pitch so that I can keep up. Tell Scarlett and Prewett that Hannah

couldn't find the broom and she decided to stay in her room, and Cassie, keep your wand out and at your side, just in case."

"I understand." Cassie unholstered her wand from the Auror style holster that Harry had bought her for Christmas previously. She let out a little squeal as Dae transformed. "That's so cute." If hamsters could have glared, Cassie had a feeling that that was what this one was doing. "Sorry, let's go."

Cassie followed Dae down to the pitch. Up above them Jamie circled and headed back to where he'd stunned Auri.

Cassie put on a big smile as she approached Ginny and Scarlett. "Sorry it took so long but Hannah couldn't find Jamie's broom. She decided to stay in her room in case he came back." She then stunned Ginny who, not expecting the attack, dropped to the ground. "Scarlett, she's not what she says she is."

"That's very interesting news." Wearing his mask, Jamie headed out of the trees, his wand at Auri's head. "Nobody moves or she dies. Venant, you'd better transform right now."

Cassie grabbed Scarlett's hand. Dae knew that he was probably going to have to choose between the two girls and Auri. He checked to see whether Cassie was holding Scarlett's hand and transformed as Jamie had requested, unholstering his wand at the same time.

Jamie wasn't surprised to see Dae holding his wand. "I want you to put your wands down, Venant." Jamie was aware that Dae would more than likely have more than one wand on him.

Dae saw a chance to get all three girls out safely. "If I do that, promise you'll let Auri go."

With Dae as his intended prize, Jamie agreed to the man's request. "I give you my word I'll release her if you put down your wands."

Dae placed his wands on the ground and Jamie whispered something to Auri before releasing her. Instead of moving away, Auri simply

pulled her wand on Dae. "You're going to come with us. So move over to my sister and Cassie and disarm them."

"I don't think so." Dae could see that she was under the Imperius curse and knew that Jamie was responsible.

Jamie sighed. "Do as she says, Venant, or I'll kill them one by one."

Dae turned his back on Jamie and Auri and stepped towards Cassie. He silently mouthed. "Accio Aurilia."

Cassie understood what he was trying to say, and as he reached out to grab her wand she aimed it at her cousin. "Accio Aurilia."

Auri was caught off guard as she shot towards Cassie. The moment Auri started flying towards Cassie, Dae turned and dove towards Jamie to divert him from attacking the girls. Hoping that Cassie had Auri, Dae called out the activation word. "Invictus."

As the girls disappeared, Jamie sent a stunner at Dae, watching as Dae collapsed to the ground. He then enervated Ginny. "You'll need to fetch your mask and get changed. The password to Hannah's room is domination. Find out what happened to her. I'll keep an eye on him. Now go."

Ginny hurried off to get her masks before rejoining Jamie a short time later, Hannah behind her. Jamie had tied Dae's hands behind his back but he was still unconscious. Jamie grabbed him by the hair. "I'll see you at the main arrival point." He then apparated away, Dae disappearing with him.

Hannah and Ginny did the same. Jamie turned to them as they appeared next to him. "Wands out. I'm going to enervate him but I don't trust him."

Jamie then erected a temporary ward to stop outward travel so that Dae couldn't escape once awake. "Enervate."

Dae didn't move for a second and then he lashed out at Jamie with his feet. He already knew that he wouldn't be able to apparate away

as it always been standard procedure when bringing a prisoner in to erect a barrier to prevent them from escaping and he didn't expect that had changed.

Jamie had been expecting Dae to attempt something and had been ready. "I suggest you get up nice and slowly, Venant."

Dae climbed to his feet. Jamie held out a hand. "After you."

Hannah pushed open the doors and moved a safe distance away as Dae came through. The Death Eaters in the room didn't bother any of them when they realized it was Carus who was escorting Dae.

Voldemort was getting ready to move his queen into position when a knock sounded on the door. "Come in."

As Jamie entered, Voldemort looked up from his board game. "Carus, I see you've brought me a gift."

Dae couldn't hide his dismay at the sight of Anna casually seated opposite Voldemort involved in what looked like a friendly game of chess; a half-drunk glass of wine beside her.

Voldemort immediately noticed the look, and went to stand by Anna, putting his hand on her shoulder. "We'll finish this later, my dear. I do believe my attention is required elsewhere."

Anna stood up and bowed slightly. "Yes, my Lord."

At that moment Seville came into the room, her shoulders bowed and she headed for Anna, who took her in her arms. "Are you alright?"

"Not really." Seville let Anna comfort her.

Voldemort walked over to Callide and asked her something before returning to where Anna and Seville were standing. "I'll see you later, Anna."

"My Lord." Anna started to lead Seville past Dae.

Watching Anna interact with Seville and Voldemort, Dae felt like weeping as he realized that Sirius had been telling the truth. "Traitorous bitch."

Anna thought that Dae was just acting and didn't realize he was really upset. "Enjoy yourself, Venant. I'm sure my Master will."

Shaking she then walked out of the room and up the corridor towards Seville's rooms so that they could return to Hogwarts.

I've split what was going to be a longer chapter into two so that I can post quicker.

Next Chapter: Hopefully Thursday or Friday of this week.

Chapter 72: Sorting Things Out

The Potter Estate

Auri struggled with Cassie. "Give me the portkey."

"No." Cassie and Scarlett both worked to get Auri off Cassie. "Stupefy."

Auri fell to the ground. Cassie turned to Scarlett. "I don't know what to do. We were supposed to wait for Professor Venant."

Hearing the scuffle, Remus ran into the room to find Cassie and Scarlett standing over Auri. "What's going on?"

Seeing Remus, both girls turned their wands on him. "Who are you?"

"I know this might be a bit of a shock, but it's really me." Remus could see neither girl believed him. "Let me enervate Auri and she'll tell you the truth."

Scarlett shook her head. "She was helping Carus, so I don't think so."

Remus' face reflected his surprise. "What do you mean?"

Pasha informed Harry that his sisters were in the arrival area and he hurried to join them, only to walk in on them holding Remus at bay. "Scarlett, why are you holding your wand on Dad, and why is Auri unconscious?"

"She's a Death Eater; she was helping Carus." Scarlett sounded tremulous as she came to the only logical conclusion she could.

"I don't know." Cassie was a little less convinced. "She sort of sounded distracted, a bit like Abbott did when Professor Venant put her under the Imperius curse."

Remus was now confused. "Just what happened at Hogwarts?"

Ignoring the wand pointing at him, Harry stepped forward and pulled Scarlett into a hug. "Scar, this really is Dad."

Scarlett pulled free of Harry and looked expectantly at Remus. "Daddy?"

"Come here, small stuff." Remus held out his arms as Scarlett gave a delighted whoop and ran at him.

Cassie was completely astounded. "But how?"

"We'll explain in a little while." Harry aimed his wand at Auri. "Finite Incantatum. Enervate."

Auri groaned. "Little shit; I'm going to kill him."

"Aurilia Lupin." Remus snapped. "Watch your mouth."

"Sorry Dad." Auri rolled to her feet. "Where's Dae?"

"He didn't make it back." Harry was worried. "I think we need to sit down and find out exactly what's going on."

Remus led everyone into the study. "Now please tell me what happened."

Between them the three girls filled Harry and Remus in on what Dae had done. Remus closed his eyes as Cassie told him about Dae attacking Carus. "Dammit."

"You-Know-Who has him by now, doesn't he?" Auri's voice sounded small. "It's my entire fault."

"No, it's not." Harry hugged his sister. "Dae should have apparated you back first."

"He didn't have time." Auri pointed out.

"What about Jamie? He thinks Hannah is on his side." Cassie was worried about her brother.

Remus knew that his next words would be unwelcome. "Cassie, Jamie is Carus."

Cassie went white. "No."

"He's telling the truth." Harry watched Scarlett bury her face in Remus' chest and begin to cry as she learnt the truth about her cousin. Cassie couldn't stop shaking.

"Cassie, we need to tell you something else." Harry hated to ask his sister to be the bearer of bad news but he couldn't do it. "Auri, tell her about Amicus; I can't."

Auri knew that Cassie was going to be devastated. "Jamie's not only the only Death Eater in your family who's close to You-Know-Who, Cassie. Your Dad is as well."

"You're trying to tell me that Dad is Amicus?" Cassie looked as if her world had imploded.

Auri felt like an executioner giving Cassie the news. "I'm sorry, Cassie but he and Jamie were the ones who forced Harry and the rest of us to flee here."

Cassie was reeling, and Harry knelt down in front her. "I'm so sorry but there's worse."

"How can it get any worse?" Cassie felt funny as little black dots began to dance in her vision.

"There's no easy way to tell you this but your Dad is dead, Cassie." Harry waited for the tears. Instead, Cassie crumpled towards her brother.

Remus passed a still sobbing Scarlett to Auri. "I'm going to leave her with Lily, and then I'm going to speak to Anna." Harry went to say something only for Remus to hold up his hand. "No arguments, Harry."

Harry watched as Remus scooped Cassie up and headed out. He knew his sister was in for another shock when she discovered that Lily was still alive.

Hogwarts

Anna apparated Seville directly into her office, before giving into her tears. Seville didn't know how to comfort her. "Anna, is there anything I can do?"

"No." Anna couldn't stop her tears. "Voldemort's going to kill him."

Seville wondered if she could speak to her father on Dae's behalf. "Perhaps I could try and..."

Anna interrupted her. "You can't, Seville. You'd only endanger yourself."

"How did they get him?" Seville asked.

"I don't know." Anna knew that Dae wouldn't have given up without a fight. "But Jamie's obviously the one who did it."

When Seville had seen Jamie holding Dae at wandpoint, she'd finally accepted that Jamie had indeed betrayed them all. "We really need to speak to Harry."

"Seville, there's something I haven't told you." Anna knew she had to tell Seville about Lily and Remus. Fate decided to rob her of her chance as a ward alerted her to the fact that someone had bypassed the gargoyles and were on their way up the stairs. Anna blew her nose and wiped her face. "I'll be back in a minute."

Potter Estate

Anna opened the door and looked expectantly at the Death Eater who stood there. "Do you have a message from Lord Voldemort?"

Remus stepped past her and took off his mask. "No, but I do have one from Harry."

Anna felt her legs go weak as Remus revealed himself. "I've been desperate to talk to you or Harry. What happened after you all disappeared?"

An intake of breath alerted the pair to the fact that they were being watched. Seville was standing transfixed at the sight of Remus. "Who is this?"

Remus wished he had a galleon for every time he'd had to explain who he was; he had a feeling he'd soon be quite rich if he had. "It's me, Seville."

Anna walked over to her and put her arm around her. "This is what I was about to tell you. Remus and Lily are both still alive."

Seville immediately worked out how. "You used Harry's wand didn't you?"

Remus nodded. "I'd give you house points but I don't think I'm allowed to anymore."

Anna smiled. "I am. Ten points to Ravenclaw."

Seville launched herself at Remus. "I've missed you so much."

"Likewise." Remus picked Seville up and swung her around. "How are you feeling?"

"I'm okay." Seville was delighted to find out that the man she actually considered her father was still alive. "How's Harry?"

"He's okay as well." Remus followed the two women into Anna's sitting room. "But unfortunately Hermione isn't."

Seville paled. "What's wrong with her?"

Remus then told them everything that had gone on up until just before Harry's duel. "Are you really sure you're going to be able to deal with pretending to care for Jamie now?"

"I've got to." Seville felt nothing but disgust for her boyfriend as Remus confirmed what Anna had told her. "There's no-one else."

"Do you know how Dae was caught?" Anna asked quietly.

Remus had hoped that Anna might have had some information for them. "He came for Scarlett and Cassie. Unfortunately Auri ended up here with him. He was defending them against Jamie. None of the girls saw Jamie take Dae down. Cassie's last sight of Dae was when he was diving towards Jamie. How did you know about it?"

Anna informed Remus of what had happened at Villa Laurifer. "He looked so defeated and hurt; I've never seen him look that way before."

"Anna, I think I know why." Remus informed her. "Sirius told him that the reason you didn't leave Hogwarts was because you're the Dark Lord's daughter."

Seville hoped it wasn't true. Anna's words allayed her fears. "But I'm not. I had Dad perform a paternity test to prove it to me after I found out about my mother. He said that he'd had one done just after I was born as well."

"Sirius planted a nasty seed in Dae's mind." Remus told her. "I tried to tell him that Sirius was lying but after seeing you playing chess with the Dark Lord, Dae must have believed that Sirius was telling the truth."

Anna closed her eyes as tears leaked out from beneath her lashes. "So Dae's probably gone to his death thinking that I've betrayed him and everyone else."

"I'm sorry." Remus wished Dae had trusted in Anna.

Anna knew that there was nothing she could do. "Have you found anything out from Sirius?"

“He’s dead, Anna.” Remus realized she didn’t know about Harry’s duel and he filled her and Seville in on what had happened during it. “The other Harry is far more barbaric and unfeeling about torturing someone than my son could ever be.”

“I think it was for the best that he came through.” Anna had a feeling that Harry wouldn’t have been able to beat Sirius without his alternate self’s help.

“I’m just glad Sirius is dead and unable to cause any more trouble.” Remus had never been so relieved to see Harry and Luna come out of the room together.

“Remus, I have another problem. “ Anna told him about the other students who’d rebelled. “I need Harry’s wand.”

“I’ll get it and apparate straight back here.” Remus disappeared only to reappear a few minutes later with the wand in his hand. “You’ll need to portkey their bodies. Take this.”

Anna took the length of rope. “Is it time activated?”

“Yes. It’s set to go off at midnight tonight.” Remus ran a hand over Seville’s head. “Are you going to be alright?”

Seville shrugged. “Honestly right now, I don’t know but I do know Anna will take care of me.”

Remus kissed Anna on the cheek. “I’d best go. I don’t want to be around if the Dark Lord appears earlier than expected. I’ll send Pasha to you. She’ll be able to pass messages on to us.”

“Thanks.” Anna felt better knowing she now had a lifeline. “Is French there?”

Remus nodded. “He is but he’s distraught at the moment with Dae’s disappearance. He can’t track him.”

“I asked him if he knew where you were.” Anna could have kicked herself. “He couldn’t tell me, could he, because of the Fidelius.”

Remus shook his head. "You know the rules. Pasha will be here shortly."

Anna held out a hand to stop him. "Before you go, you should know that Jamie has a horcrux hanging around his neck."

Remus swore. "How did you find out?"

"I got him drunk on your scotch and he told me." Anna wasn't sure how to deal with it. "When he passed out I searched him and tried to take it but it threw me across the room. I didn't dare touch it again."

"Don't try and get it unless things become absolutely desperate or you find a way of doing it without exposing yourself." Remus warned her. "It's too risky. Did you find anything else out?"

"Voldemort's offered to make Jamie immortal, and..." Anna hadn't told Seville yet. "he's promised Seville to Jamie."

"Over my dead body." Remus snarled.

Seville felt warm inside at Remus' protective nature. "I'd rather marry Malfoy."

Anna pulled a face. "Which tells us exactly how you feel about Jamie now."

"Exactly." Seville knew that she was going to have work hard at fooling Jamie but she was determined to do it.

"I take it that you've got the horcrux off Sirius' body." Anna assumed.

Remus confirmed her assumption. "We're going to destroy it tomorrow. Everyone's a little on edge today and we need to figure out how to do it first."

Anna put a hand on Remus' arm. "You'll look after Seamus and the others won't you?"

"Don't worry." Remus could see that she genuinely cared about the students. "I'll take Draco and Harry with me; I have a feeling I'm going to be doing a lot of explaining about me again."

"Good luck with that." Anna held up Harry's wand. "And thanks for this. I'll keep it here if I may."

"I think you may have more use for it than we will." Remus gave them both one last hug before apparating away.

The Next Day

Harry pulled the wedding band out of his pocket and looked at it as it sat in the palm of his hand. "This is it." Harry felt almost reluctant to let it go. "Do you think I should hold on to it?"

Remus knocked it out of Harry's hand. "I think no-one should be touching it." He then maneuvered it onto the table where half of the household were sitting.

A miserable looking Cassie clung to Lily. After finding out her mother was still alive, she'd refused to leave her side. Nia had refused to let any of her daughters into the room, so they were sitting fuming in another room. Anna was helping Theo and some of the others with research on Hermione.

Lily looked down at the ring with disgust. "I can't believe he used his wedding band as a vessel for Voldemort's soul."

Remus nodded. "I'm surprised you never noticed anything."

Lily had a theory why she hadn't. "Sirius was so twisted, I think the ring was feeding off him and vice versa. Why bother with me?"

Harry stared down at it. "I want to touch it."

Remus frowned at Harry. "Please tell me you locked this up last night."

Harry shook his head. "I was going to but I just couldn't do it." He tried to reach out to touch the ring again.

Remus barred his way. "It's obviously looking for another energy source to feed off now Sirius is dead, and you're more vulnerable than most."

Cassie gave a little hiccupping sob. Lily rubbed her back. "Wouldn't you prefer to sit with Scarlett?"

"No." Cassie shook her head and held on more tightly to Lily's arm.

Luna shuddered. "How do we dispose of it?"

Harry forced himself to concentrate. "The other Harry used fiend fire to destroy a horcrux. We could try that."

Remus shook his head. "It's too dangerous. We need another way."

After those gathered made several suggestions, all of which were dismissed for one reason or another, Seamus came up with a suggestion. "What about holy water? I know it sounds far-fetched but it's worth a try."

"It is. But I can't fetch it." Remus told him. "I can't step foot onto consecrated ground, nor can I handle the stuff."

Dudley frowned. "I thought that was only vampires."

"So did I." Remus told him. "Until I nearly died in the graveyard at the Riddle House. If Astus hadn't dragged me away, then I would have."

"How do you know about the holy water?" Lily was curious, not having heard this before.

"I had a run-in with a vampire who was being attacked. I got in the way and got hit with holy water; it burned almost as badly as silver nitrate. Luckily I managed to apparate home so I could wash it off. Even with treatment, it took almost a week for the burn to heal, and it

was painfully uncomfortable while it did.” Remus didn’t fill them in on why he’d had a run-in with a vampire.

Lily pulled out her wand. “I won’t be long.” Cassie looked up at her. “Don’t go, Mum.”

Harry stood up; he wanted to be away from the pull of the ring and thought it best if he was out of the vicinity. “I’ll go.” Ten minutes later he was back.

Lily poured the holy water Harry had fetched into a small metal bowl. She then transfigured a piece of paper into heavy weight metal lid. She turned to Remus. “When I drop the ring in, cover up the bowl with the lid and then throw up a shield.” She turned to the assembled group. “Either leave the room or erect an absorption shield.”

Harry immediately threw up a shield around himself, Orion and Cassie, who’d finally let her mother go and now clung to her sister instead. Luna, Dudley, Blaise, Seamus and Lavender ducked under the table before doing the same. Lily carefully hovered the ring towards the bowl and Remus did the same with the lid. As soon as Lily lowered the ring in the holy water, Remus covered the bowl and sealed it. Lily threw up a shield over both of them, and Remus did the same as soon as he could before they both moved further back.

Harry cringed as tortured screams issued from inside the metal bowl. Suddenly an explosion ripped the bowl and cover apart, showering the room in tiny shards of razor sharp debris. Lily kept her shield up and walked over to the table. “I expected it to have blackened or have been destroyed. I’m surprised the ring is still intact.”

Remus held out his hand. “Let me check it.”

Lily smacked his hand away. “There could still be traces of holy water on it.” She reached out and picked up the ring. “I don’t feel anything.” She put it back down and cast several spells over it. “I’m not getting anything from it.”

Harry walked over. “Let me.” He hesitantly put his hand on it and let out a sigh of relief. “Neither am I.”

“One down and one to go. So the question remains. How are we going to get that other horcrux?” Remus turned to the others.

“You can’t kill Jamie to get it, Remus.” Lily was convinced that Jamie had been influenced by the horcrux.

“I’ve already said that I won’t unless it’s absolutely necessary.” Remus informed her. “Anna will obviously do everything she can to obtain it but I don’t want her risking herself to do it.”

Harry knew that Remus was right. “We can’t do anything about it right now, so I think we should all go and get some breakfast. Afterwards we can go over our plans for the Ministry.”

Bored of sitting with her sisters and waiting, Auri made her way upstairs to Harry’s room. She knew that her brother wouldn’t mind if she popped in. She made her way over to Hermione who silently lay there. Auri shivered; it was almost as if Hermione was dead. She put a hand on the girl’s cheek and was relieved to find she was still warm. She jumped when she heard Draco’s voice behind her. “What are you doing?”

“I just wanted to sit with her for a while. I don’t know if she can hear us but I wanted her to know that we’re doing everything we can to find a cure.” Auri leant back against Draco as he wrapped his arms around her waist.

“Uncle Craig said it was unlikely that she could hear us.” Draco stared down at the still figure lying on the bed. “Poor Harry; this must be really tough on him.”

“We’ll do it, Draco.” Auri looked down on her friend. “We’ll find an answer.”

Villa Laurifer

Voldemort walked around Dae. “So are we going to do this the hard way or the easy way?”

"I'm not going to tell you anything." Dae snarled. "You can go to hell."

Voldemort ignored the comment. "So let's start with who you really are. Amicus informed me that you're either Leonardo or Felix Flamel, so which is it?"

Dae knew from Remus that Sirius must have had the Marauders Map. "I'm Dae Venant."

"I think you look more like a Felix." Voldemort sat down. "You can sit down as well."

Dae wondered what Voldemort was playing at but sat down when Jamie pushed him towards the sofa. "I'll never tell you anything."

"You don't really need to voluntarily." Voldemort got back up and grabbed Dae's chin before looking at him. "I've plenty of ways of finding out what I need to know."

Dae knew that the ring he was wearing and his own defenses wouldn't hold up forever against Voldemort's invasion of his mind but he also knew that he wasn't just going to roll over and let Voldemort in. Steeling himself for the pain he'd know would be coming, Dae let his mind go blank.

Twenty minutes later Voldemort let go of Dae's chin. Dae flopped back against the sofa his head aching but with his mind still intact; now he knew why Voldemort had had him sit down. "You've got quite the defense, Accredo."

Dae was too exhausted to provide a comeback and closed his eyes as he realized that Voldemort knew who he really was.

Voldemort turned to Jamie. "Carus, I think this is a job for someone a little closer to home." He turned to Hannah and Ginny. "Fetch two men to escort Black to the dungeons."

Dae knew he was probably going to be tortured for information and simply resigned himself to the fact that he was going to die. As he lay with his eyes closed, he listened to doors open and close. He heard

Voldemort say something quietly to whomever had entered the room. Dae's eyes snapped open as a voice he recognized addressed him. "Hello little Reggie."

Dae scowled as he came face to face with his cousin. "Bella."

Voldemort turned to her. "I've managed to dig up a few childhood memories but little more than that. I leave it up to you to find out more."

Dae realized then that his early memories had been how Voldemort had worked out who he was. He listened as Voldemort continued to give Bellatrix her instructions. "You can do whatever you need to but I still want him alive at the end of it; he's going to be my bait. Find out what happened to Amicus and what Harry has planned."

Dae wondered what Voldemort meant by bait but he had little time to dwell on it as he was dragged to the dungeons by the two men who'd entered the room with Hannah and Ginny.

Neville sat shivering in his cell as he listened to the man in the next cell scream time and time again as the woman who was obviously torturing him continued to so relentlessly. As Neville heard the woman put the man under the Cruciatus curse yet again, Neville regretted not taking Seville up on her offer of help but he'd been too proud to admit that he still cared about her. Wrapping his arms around himself he covered his ears and tried to drown out the noise of the man's suffering.

Twelve Years Later

Auri looked up as she felt someone drop a kiss on her head. "Healer Black."

Draco grinned and sat down. "Healer Lupin, or should I say, Doctor Lupin?"

"I prefer Healer Lupin, and you know it." Auri threw a pencil at him. "Why aren't you heading home? You'll miss Devon's bedtime otherwise."

“Auri, do you have any idea what time it is?” Draco looked over to the clock that sat on the wall.

“Oh shit.” Auri shook her head in disbelief. “I’m going to be in so much trouble. I told Daniel I’d be home three hours ago.”

“Things not going well?” Draco asked, concerned for her.

“Not really.” Auri didn’t want to go into how badly her relationship was going. “Why are you here?”

“Dad was feeling a little tired, so I said I’d cover his shift.” Draco informed her. “I know I’ll regret it tomorrow though.”

“I thought it might be a bit much travelling back from Australia and then coming into work.” Auri started to put together her things, including the large almost overfilled red folder.

“It didn’t work did it?” Draco knew that was the only reason why Auri would have stayed so late.

“No. I really thought I’d found the cure this time, but there was no reaction at all.” Auri pulled out some papers from the folder and passed them over to Draco. “This is a copy of my latest notes. Would you mind looking at them; see if there’s something I’ve missed?”

Draco took the sheaf of papers. “I’ll look at them but I can’t see me finding anything you’ve missed. This is your area of specialty, Auri, not mine.”

“I’d appreciate any help I can get, Dray.” Auri finished piling her papers into her briefcase. “I’d better get going.”

Draco stood up and kissed her on the cheek. “I’ll look through these and get back to you tomorrow night.”

“Thanks.” Auri opened the door. “Tell my sister I’ll see her on Friday for lunch at Cassie’s place, and give Devon a big kiss from her Auntie Auri.”

"You'd better go before Daniel has a bigger meltdown than he's already going to." Draco ushered his sister-in-law out of her office and watched as she dashed towards the apparition point.

Daniel closed his folder and put it into his briefcase just as Auri apparated in. "I was about to leave."

"I'm so sorry." Auri dropped her things onto the chair beside the fireplace. "I was going over my notes again and time just ran away with me."

"Auri, you're never going to find an answer." Daniel was fed up with playing second fiddle to Auri's work.

"I can't give in." Auri could tell that a fight was brewing. "Daniel, everyone else has given up trying to find a cure. I won't."

"Because they know it's a hopeless cause." Daniel snapped, before lowering his voice. "Auri, you're burning the candle at both ends. You can't keep it up."

"I have to; there's no-one else." Auri looked at the box that was sitting by Daniel's feet. "You're leaving as in forever, aren't you?"

Daniel nodded. "I just can't keep doing this."

Auri wasn't entirely surprised. Things between them had deteriorated to the point where they spent little time together, and when they did it inevitably ended up in an argument. "Is that everything?"

Daniel shook his head. "Just what I really need."

"I'll get Gresham to bring the rest of your things over tomorrow." Auri dropped her head as she felt tears begin to fill her eyes.

Daniel felt like a heel but he knew that their relationship wasn't going anywhere. "Auri, I care about you, I really do but you're not helping yourself by pursuing this. I know how it feels when you've given

everything a try to find a cure for a patient, but even I know when it's time to give up."

Auri wiped her eyes and gave him a watery smile. "I just can't, Daniel. Being a doctor I thought you'd at least understand that."

"I understand that it's ruining your life, Auri." Daniel slid on his jacket and picked up the box before kissing her on the cheek. "If you ever need me, I'll still be your friend."

Auri couldn't speak and simply nodded before opening the door. Daniel gave her one last look before heading out. Once he'd gone, she burst into tears. A few minutes later she wiped her face. "This is bloody stupid. I knew it was going to end up like this."

She headed into the kitchen and rummaged through the fridge, pulling out some leftover pizza from the night before. Opening the microwave she threw it in and uncorked the half-drunk bottle of red wine that was sitting on the side, pouring herself a glass. Once the microwave pinged, she withdrew the pizza and headed to sit down on the sofa, waving her wand absently at her stereo player. Accioing her briefcase, she dragged out the originals of the notes she'd asked Draco to look through. All thoughts of Daniel vanished as she lost herself in work.

A persistent humming from the fireplace woke Auri from her sleep. Pushing her notes aside, she climbed off the sofa and went to answer it. "Dray, is something wrong?"

"I need you right now." Draco didn't fill her in on what was wrong and disappeared from the fireplace.

Auri hurriedly pulled on her white jacket and apparated to the hospital, before heading for Draco's office. He was pacing the floor waiting for her. "So what's the big emergency?"

"Come with me." Draco led her down to the long-term patient ward. "Melanie was doing her nightly checks when she discovered something."

Auri felt her stomach go over as Draco stopped outside Room 7C. Draco pushed her towards the door. "Go in."

Auri pushed open the door and stepped inside.

The room's occupant turned around at the sound of her footsteps. "What the hell is going on and why am I here?"

Auri burst into tears.

Next Chapter: We start to find out what's happened in the interim.

Chapter 73: Smoke and Mirrors

I've split this chapter into three parts to get it out quicker again.

April 10th 2010

Auri rolled over and lay in bed thinking about the previous night. Picking up the newspaper she grimaced as she saw the headlines. "Jamie Potter Day Celebrations To Be Bigger Than Ever." Auri threw the paper onto the floor in disgust. She wished that the truth would come out about that day.

March 16th 1998

Bella knocked on the door and made her way into her Master's rooms. "My Lord."

"What have you found out?" Voldemort looked up from the chess game he was playing with Aditi. "Check."

"Not much I'm afraid." Bella had done her best but had been able to learn little from Dae. "But Regulus took great delight in telling me that Harry had challenged Amicus to a duel. However he'd left before he discovered what the outcome was."

Voldemort scowled as Aditi moved her bishop to intercept. "I think by now we can safely assume that Amicus is either dead or incapacitated."

"I think the same." Bella had been even crueler than usual to Dae at the thought that her beloved cousin might have been killed.

Behind his mask, Jamie held back his tears. "But Harry was nowhere near as good as Amicus."

"I'm well aware of that." Voldemort knocked over his king as he realized that he couldn't win. "Thank you for the game, my dear."

Aditi bowed before leaving the room. Jamie shed his mask. "I'll kill him if he's hurt Dad."

Bella laughed at Jamie. "If Lupin has bested Sirius, then you would stand little chance."

Voldemort held up his hand for silence. "I'm missing something; I just know it."

Jamie had a feeling that he knew what it was but had to remain silent about Harry's alternate self as he was bound by his oath.

Voldemort began to pace the room. "We need to find Harry and his rebel friends."

Jamie thought about the strands of hair he'd taken. "I might have a way." He then filled Voldemort in on his fledgling idea.

March 18th 1998

Harry looked round the students who'd been 'executed' for their disobedience. "I'm sorry we didn't really get much of a chance to talk before now but as you know, destroying the horcrux was our first priority. Is there anyone who has any sort of information that might help us?"

No-one except for Pansy nodded. "I have."

"What is it, Pansy?" Harry had been surprised to find his former girlfriend had been ready and willing to betray Voldemort.

"It's about Lucius and my sister." Pansy was glad she was finally able to contribute some worthwhile information. "They're Death Eaters better known as Astus and Callide."

"Dad and I already know that." Harry wished the information had been something more useful. "Pansy, is there anything else you know that might be able to help us?"

Pansy nodded. "Cho was also part of our group but Ron and Neville didn't know that as she only passed on information through me. There were others I think who were in contact with Ron but I don't

know for sure, and we can't ask him now. I do know Cho's been in contact with a lot of Cedric's former friends who've had to take the Dark Mark. Harry, they don't want to fight for the Dark Lord."

"Why didn't the Dark Lord find this out?" Remus asked.

"Because he simply came to witness our deaths; he didn't question us." Pansy shrugged. "Perhaps he believed that we were all who were involved. But, as I said, I'm sure there must have been others."

"How trustworthy are the ones in contact with Cho?" Harry wasn't ready to give up the safety of his friends and family without being sure first.

"I don't know." Pansy admitted. "We'd need to contact Cho at school; only she knows how to contact them."

"I thought all communication was checked." Remus hadn't been aware of any leaks.

"It's in code, Professor." Pansy smirked. "That's the thing with purebloods like myself; we've never come across Muggle techniques like this before and most of the Death Eaters are too stupid to notice."

Harry and Remus were both completely surprised. Even as Alumno, Harry had thought he'd known everything that was going on in the school; he obviously hadn't been as aware as he'd thought. "Contact Cho then. We'll set up a meeting. I'll speak to Draco and Maman; they can co-ordinate with you."

"I'll do it now." Pansy went to leave, only for Harry to put out a hand to stop her. "Pansy, would you tell Draco about his father? He pretty much knows he's a Death Eater but not that he's Astus. Dad and I can't do it due to the oaths we've sworn."

"I'll tell him." Pansy had no idea where Draco would be though. "Where can I find him?"

"He'll either be with Auri or in the conservatory." Harry knew Draco had found the conservatory a place of comfort.

Pansy left the room and headed for the conservatory where she found Draco sitting watching water trickle down a waterfall and into the small waterway that encircled the entire building. "Do you mind if I join you?"

"Of course not." Draco patted the seat beside him. "What's up?"

"I need to tell you something." Pansy wished she had better news. "It's about your father."

"I know that he's a Death Eater but no-one's been able to confirm it." Draco wondered if Pansy could help.

"He is. He's called Astus and my sister is known as Callide." Pansy rolled up her sleeve. "They told me after I took the Dark Mark."

"You took it willingly?" Draco wasn't entirely surprised but he'd hoped that Pansy would have had more sense.

"We needed someone on the inside." Pansy smiled ruefully. "Not that it did us any good."

"Would you like to get rid of it?" Draco knew that Lily would remove it for her.

"That's a stupid question, Dray." Pansy stood up. "Of course I would."

"Come with me." Draco held out his hand to his former best friend.

Pansy let Draco lead her out of the conservatory and towards the study where he knew Harry would be. Draco knocked and Harry opened the door. "I take it you want to talk about Lucius."

"That's not why I'm here." Draco turned to Pansy. "Show him."

Pansy unrolled her sleeve again. "I should have told you, Harry, but I was a little embarrassed."

"I already knew; I was actually there when you took the Dark Mark." Harry admitted. "Which is why I was so surprised to see you when I arrived with Dad to collect you guys."

"Do you think Aunt Lily would get rid of it?" Draco asked hopefully.

"I don't see why not." Harry smiled at the look of astonishment on Pansy's face. "Maman is very good at what she does, Pansy."

Draco dragged Pansy out and headed towards the sitting room. "You looked surprised when you heard Harry's comment."

Pansy stopped walking. "What do you expect? When you asked me if I wanted to get rid of the Mark I just thought it was a rhetorical question; not that you really could do it."

"I can't." Draco started walking again. "But Aunt Lily can."

Draco entered the sitting room where Lily was talking quietly with Narcissa. "Aunt Lily, Harry has cleared everyone who arrived from Hogwarts. But Pansy took the Dark Mark so that she could try and find out information. It's of no use to her now. Would you remove it please?"

Lily nodded and pulled out her wand. "Has Draco told you how painful this is going to be?"

Pansy shook her head. "No, but if it frees me from this, then I'm willing to undergo anything."

Half an hour later Draco supported his friend to the room that she was sharing with Lavender and onto one of the beds. "If you need anything called for Bascombe. He's my house-elf."

Pansy just wanted to lie down and sleep. "Thanks Dray."

"I'm just glad we could help." Draco kissed Pansy on the cheek, before covering his friend up and heading out of the door.

April 12th 1998

Jamie waited for Hannah to come into the room. "Hi there."

"Jamie." Hannah was surprised to find him sitting on one of the chairs in front of the fireplace. "I thought you were supposed to be studying with Seville."

"I thought I'd spend a little time with you instead." Jamie hid his amusement as Hannah blushed. "Hannah, I have something important I want to share with you."

"What is it?" Hannah slid to the floor in front of the fireplace.

Jamie pulled out his mask. "This."

"Where did you get that?" Hannah reverently took the mask.

"From Lord Voldemort." Jamie watched as the penny dropped.

"You're Carus?" Hannah was incredulous.

"I am." Jamie slid down beside her. "And I need your help to find out some information for me from our esteemed headmistress." Despite their talk the previous month, Jamie couldn't shake the nagging feeling that Anna wasn't being entirely truthful.

Hannah felt her heart begin to beat quicker as Jamie's leg touched hers. "I'll do anything I can."

"I need you to take this." Jamie held out a vial of polyjuice potion he'd acquired from Voldemort's potion master.

Hannah recognized the potion. "Who do you want me to be?"

"Aurilia Lupin." Jamie held up one of the hairs he'd taken from his cousin.

"What do you want me to find out?" Hannah took both objects from Jamie.

"Anything you can." Jamie let his leg brush against Hannah's again.

"I don't know how to act like Auri." Hannah didn't want to move. "I don't really know her that well."

"I'll coach you." Jamie took Hannah's hand and kissed her knuckles. He knew that she'd have done as he'd asked without playing her but he believed in making sure of things.

Hannah shivered. "When do you want me to do it?"

Jamie slid his arm around Hannah's shoulder and pulled her towards him. "This evening. I'll tell you what I want from you then but right now I think we can find something a little more pleasurable to take up our time."

Hannah closed her eyes as Jamie kissed her.

Later that evening

Anna opened her door to find a bloody and weeping Aurilia standing there. "Auri, what are you doing here?"

Hannah sobbed out her answer. "I was walking in the woods at home. I wasn't paying attention and wandered off. The next thing I knew, I felt something hit me and then a tug behind my navel." She buried her face in her hands. "When I looked round, I was in a hut. There were two Death Eaters there. They demanded to know where Harry was."

Anna put her arm around the girl. "You must have wandered outside the boundary protected by the Fidelius." She looked at the mess the men had made of Auri's face. "Let me get some salve for those bruises. Are you hurt anywhere else?"

Hannah let herself continue to cry. "I want Harry."

Anna felt her heart go out to the girl. "Sweetie, I'll get your Dad to come and fetch you. He must be worried sick." Anna missed the

shocked look that crossed the girl's face at the mention of Remus as she'd turned to get the salve from her rooms. "Wait here."

As soon as Anna disappeared into her rooms, Hannah pulled out the communication mirror Jamie had given her and quickly called out Jamie's name. "You were right about her; get here now."

Anna returned to the room to find Auri facing the wall. "Come sit down by the fire. I've asked Pasha to fetch Remus."

Hannah turned around and went to sit by the fire. Just as she went to apply the salve, Anna scowled as the wards alerted her that someone was coming; she'd changed them after being surprised by Remus to let her know exactly who it was. "Not now." She looked at Auri. "Go sit with Seville. She should be in her rooms. I need to get rid of Jamie."

Hannah hid her smirk and made her way into Anna's inner sanctum. Guessing which room was likely to be Seville's she knocked.

Hearing a knock at her door, Seville got up off the bed to answer it. "Auri, what are you doing here?"

Hannah looked down at the floor. "I was attacked by two Death Eaters before managing to escape, and this was the first place I thought to come."

Seville put an arm around her in order to comfort the girl. "How did you manage to get away?"

Hannah thought quickly. "I threw dirt from the floor into their faces and ran before calling the Knight Bus."

"Let me get you a hot chocolate." Seville walked into the kitchen. "You must be freezing."

Out in her office, Anna opened the door to find Jamie making his way up the steps. "Jamie, what brings you here?"

"I wondered if you had anything to tell me." Jamie leant back against the door.

Anna felt her heart sink as she remembered her promise to him; she knew she'd die if she didn't tell him about Auri. "Your cousin is here." Anna stood in front of the door to her rooms. "But I can't let you hurt her."

"I have no intention of hurting her. Wait here." Jamie ordered as he pushed by Anna and headed into the sitting room to find Auri being given hot chocolate by Seville. "Auri, how lovely to see you again."

Seville was frightened for the girl and defended her to Jamie. "She was attacked and had nowhere else to go."

Hannah stood up and faced Jamie. "I have nothing to say to you, you traitor."

Remus apparated in just as Hannah started speaking, drawing his wand the moment he saw someone who looked remarkably like his daughter. "Perhaps you'd like to talk to me instead."

Seville frowned. "What's going on?"

"This isn't Auri." Remus knew that as he'd just seen his daughter.

"Uncle Remus." Jamie had also drawn his wand. "What a miraculous return from the dead."

"Isn't it just?" Voldemort walked into the room, Anna being held between two of his men who'd apparated in moments after Jamie had pushed by her.

Remus attempted to apparate. "Shit."

"You don't think I'd let a prize like you leave, do you Remus?" Voldemort knew that Remus couldn't attack him and pulled out his wand. "Goodnight."

The last thing Remus saw was the horrified look on Seville's face as darkness claimed him.

Villa Laurifer

Neville looked up as the door opened and someone was thrown into the room with him. Getting up he felt his way across the black hole that was his cell until he found whomever it was who had come to join him. "Are you alright?"

Seville groaned. "Nev?"

"Seville, what are you doing here?" Neville was horrified to find his sister in the cell with him.

"I think I'm in trouble." Seville winced as she felt the lump on the back of her head. "Ouch."

"What happened?" Neville, who by now knew where everything was in the dark, led his sister over to his bed.

"To be honest, I don't really know." Seville felt queasy and cold. "It's freezing down here."

"Put this around you." Neville wrapped the thin rag that masqueraded as a blanket around her.

"Thanks." Seville felt better when Neville also put his arm around her. "I don't think I'm going to make it out of this alive."

"Join the club." Neville had constantly waited to be taken to be executed. "I think you were the only thing stopping me from being killed."

"I'm sorry, Nev." Seville closed her eyes as she realized that it was probably true. "I'm afraid your immunity has probably just run out."

"It's not your fault." Neville knew that if he was going to die, he wanted Seville to know how he really felt. "Seville, I know this probably isn't the best time, but I want to say I'm sorry for how I've treated you. Sitting here, I've had a lot of time to think things through and I know that I've behaved like a complete bastard to you, and certainly not how a loving brother should have acted."

Neville pre-empted Seville from butting in in the middle of his speech. "Don't say anything, I haven't finished yet. When I found out that Mum had been a Death Eater, I blamed you and I shouldn't have. I was resentful because Mum loved you and it never felt as if she loved me. I know it's no excuse, and I have no right to ask but will you forgive me?"

Seville felt tears come to her eyes. "Nev, I forgive you. No matter what has happened between us you're still my brother and I love you."

"I don't deserve it but thank you. I love you, Seville." Neville couldn't stop his own tears and the siblings clung to each other, glad to have finally made up.

Suddenly a noise came from outside the cell and the sound of someone being dragged along reached their ears. Neville sighed. "I hope they don't start torturing anyone again."

"Who were they torturing before?" Seville heard the sounds of chains being attached.

"Ron was tortured by You-Know-Who himself, and last month it was someone called Reggie." Neville shrugged. "But I don't know who he was."

Seville knew immediately who it had been. "I know but I can't tell you, and I also have a pretty good idea why they were torturing him. Is he dead?"

"No." Neville informed a relieved Seville. "He's in the cell next door. There are bars directly in front of us dividing the two cells even though you can't really see them in the dark."

Seville got up, hands out in front of her until she connected with the cold metal. She then called through the bars. "Hello." An incoherent mumbling came back to her. In tears she turned back to Neville, wishing she could see her brother. "What did they do to him?"

"A woman kept putting the Cruciatus curse on him again and again; I think she sent him over the edge." Neville leant back against the wall. "Do you know who they've just brought in?"

"I think so." Seville shivered again and slowly made her way back to Neville.

Suddenly Bella's voice reached Seville's ears. "Praeses, my love. You're going to tell me what happened to Sirius."

"Something's happened to Sirius Black?" Neville was horrified.

"Harry killed him." Seville realized that because Remus had obliviated him, Neville had no idea who Sirius had been. "Sirius Black was Amicus."

"This is all very confusing." Neville winced as Remus screamed out loud. "It's definitely the same woman who tortured Reggie; I'd recognize her voice anywhere."

"She is Bellatrix Lestrange." Seville felt Neville stiffen at the mention of her name. "She didn't kill your father, Neville, Dumbledore did. It's a long story and something I think I'd best share to try and take our minds off what she's obviously about to do."

Two hours later, Seville had told Neville everything she could without breaking any oaths. "That's about it."

"Wow." Neville wished Remus would stop screaming; Neville had realized who it was when he'd heard Remus tell Bella to 'fuck off' when she'd asked for information.

"So Bella. What have you found out?" A new voice reached the two children even though neither of them had heard anyone come into the dungeons.

Seville whispered to Neville. "That's Lord Voldemort."

Neville remembered Voldemort's voice only too well. "I'd hoped never to hear his voice ever again."

"He refuses to say anything, my Lord." Bella stood back as Voldemort took Remus' hand in his chin and attempted to breach his mind.

Even beaten and battered, Remus refused to lower his shields. Voldemort let go of his chin. "Perhaps a different form of persuasion."

Remus pulled at his chains as he watched them chain Anna up beside him. She shook her head at him. "You'll tell them nothing." Anna gasped as one of the Death Eaters slapped her across the face.

"I'm not going to." Remus reassured her before looking at Voldemort. "There's nothing you can do that will make me talk."

Voldemort merely smiled and whispered something to Bella, who walked out of the dungeons, only to return a few minutes bearing a small baby in her arms. Voldemort smirked. "As I said, perhaps a different form of persuasion."

Anna started to cry. "Please not Chloe. She's only a baby."

"So perhaps Remus would like to tell us what's going on. I'd hate for him to have to watch his daughter die." Voldemort took the baby from Bella as Anna struggled to free herself.

Remus sagged in his chains. "I'll tell you whatever I can." Remus heard Anna let out a sigh of relief. "But most things are protected."

"Very well. I want you to swear on your magic and your life that you are telling me the truth." Voldemort rocked the small baby and talked quietly to her as she began to fuss. Remus gave the requisite oath and Voldemort began questioning him. "Exactly how did you manage to come back from the dead?"

"I used a doctored wand." Remus didn't want to bring Lily up.

Voldemort wasn't stupid. "So that means Lady Black is still alive then; no doubt she was the perpetrator of the wand. Am I correct?"

Chloe gave a little whimper and, reminded of why he was having to come clean, Remus reluctantly nodded. "You are."

Voldemort hushed the small child. "Now I'd like to know what Harry has planned."

Anna had no idea. "I don't know."

Remus did. "He's going to attack you."

"When and how many?" Voldemort looked down at the bundle he was holding as a small murmur reached his ears. Chloe had fallen asleep.

"At least twenty of us; we were going to attack once we received word you'd taken the Ministry." Remus hated having to tell Voldemort the information but he didn't trust him not to hurt Chloe if he didn't co-operate.

"And who were you going to receive word from?" Voldemort watched Remus break out in a sweat as he tried to find a way around his oath. "Obviously you can't tell me. No worries, I have a pretty good idea as to who it would be."

Remus relaxed in his chains.

Voldemort stroked Chloe's hair. "How long has my daughter been part of this?"

"Seville has nothing to do with the attack on the Ministry." Remus was glad that Seville had no knowledge of the planned attack. He just hoped Voldemort didn't question him more thoroughly about Seville.

Voldemort turned around. "Aditi, fetch Abbott."

Hannah followed Aditi into the open area of the dungeons. "My Lord."

"Remus here says that Seville doesn't know what's going on." Voldemort lifted the small girl so that she was on his shoulder before turning to face Hannah. "Is that true?"

"Yes, my Lord." Hannah told him. "Seville seemed surprised to see Lupin's daughter there, and looked even more shocked when Lupin appeared."

Voldemort wondered if he'd made a mistake about Seville. He turned to Anna. "Is she telling the truth?"

"Yes." Anna snarled. "Now let my daughter go."

"Not yet." Voldemort knew that Anna was beginning to get angry at the sight of Chloe in his arms. "Now on to the matter of Amicus. Where is he?"

"He's dead." Remus admitted. "Harry fought and killed him in a duel."

Bella gave a little wail. "No."

Remus wanted to taunt her but didn't dare with Voldemort holding Chloe. "It was a fair fight."

"I wouldn't expect anything less of Harry." Voldemort walked towards the exit. "I'll be keeping an eye on Chloe here."

He passed the baby to Hannah. "You may take her upstairs to my room; a house-elf will assist you. Then tell Carus I want to see him."

Hannah left and Voldemort turned back to Anna. "I find I still have need of you. Open wide."

Knowing her daughter was being held to ransom, Anna had little choice except to open her mouth and swallow the potion Voldemort poured in. "What is that?"

"Liquid Imperious. I know I have your daughter as security but I wanted to make absolutely sure you'd do as you're told." Voldemort smirked. "You're going to fulfill your teaching duties for me without telling anyone what's happened here. I want to know if you're contacted by Harry or any of his friends. If anyone asks after your daughter, you can say that she's staying here with Seville as you fear for her safety in Hogwarts. Do you understand?"

Anna started to feel light-headed. "Yes."

Voldemort could tell from Anna's dazed look that she was definitely under the influence of the potion, and turned to his men. "Take her back to Hogwarts."

Anna didn't resist as she was led out. Voldemort addressed Bella. "Remus is yours to do with as you please but don't kill him and for goodness sake don't make him insane. I still have some questions for him and it's almost impossible to make sense of anything once you've done that." He then headed over to Neville's cell. "Open it."

Aditi opened the door.

"Seville." Voldemort lit the room to find the two children huddled together on the bed. "I'd like you to come with me."

Seville kissed Neville on the cheek and followed Voldemort out. Once they'd reached his rooms, he turned to her. "I'm sorry I doubted you but you can imagine what I thought when I saw Remus there, and you offering shelter to his daughter."

"I understand." Seville was wary of Voldemort.

"Good." Voldemort led Seville to sit down. "I'm sorry about your head; my men were a little overzealous. Let me heal it."

Seville forced herself to keep still as Voldemort healed her head. She glanced at the door as a knock came, and Jamie made his way into the room. "Hannah said you wanted to see me, my Lord."

"I'd like you to escort my daughter back to her rooms." Voldemort stood up. "Goodnight, Seville."

"Goodnight, Father." Seville inclined her head and followed Jamie out.

Once inside Seville's rooms, Jamie closed the door behind him before turning to face his girlfriend. "I know you're on Harry's side, Seville."

"I don't know what you mean." Seville denied Jamie's accusation. "My Father certainly doesn't think I am."

"I believe differently." Jamie looked into Seville's eyes. "But I won't give you away."

"You're supposed to be loyal to my father. If you truly believe I'm part of it, you'd give me away." Seville challenged Jamie.

"I am loyal to your Father but you're also my girlfriend, and I'd like to give you the benefit of the doubt." Jamie still thought she was part of it but he also knew that he didn't want her to die. "If I truly believe that you are repentant about joining Harry, then I'll support you."

"I admit Harry did turn my head for a while with his ideals but that was before I started to get to know my Father properly." Seville hoped Jamie believed her. "I love my Father and would do nothing to jeopardize our relationship."

Jamie decided to back off from questioning Seville for a moment and poured her a glass of juice. "You must be thirsty."

"Thank you, I am." Seville was. "But I'd prefer something warmer."

Jamie called out to a house-elf who brought a hot chocolate for the girl. "Why didn't you tell me how you really felt about Harry and his cause?"

"Because honestly, I wasn't sure I could trust you." Seville felt warmth fill her as she sipped the hot drink. "You've given me no reason to believe anything different other than you supported Harry. I was hardly going to say that I think I've changed my mind how I feel about my Father."

"Didn't Anna tell you about our conversation?" Jamie asked.

Seville shook her head and lied. "I had no idea you had even had a conversation with her."

"Speaking of Anna, I really need to get back to school." Jamie stood up. "Walk me to the door."

Seville put down her hot chocolate and followed Jamie, trying not to pull away as Jamie wrapped his arms around her waist.

"I love you, Seville." Jamie lowered his head and kissed Seville, deepening the kiss when she relaxed against him.

As the kiss ended, Seville smiled happily at Jamie. "I love you too."

Jamie decided there and then to ask. "Will you marry me?"

Seville had always hoped that she'd feel joyful about her marriage proposal and not disgusted. Plastering an excited look on her face she forced herself to kiss Jamie, before pulling back. "Yes."

"Good." Jamie kissed her again, letting one hand slide down to cup her bottom, while the other one slid up and under her top.

Seville couldn't deal with that and pushed him away. "Jamie! Not in here. What if someone was to come in?"

Jamie thought Seville was being shy and smiled. "Lord Voldemort is the only person likely to come in without knocking first."

"Exactly." Seville playfully tapped Jamie on the shoulder. "And I don't think my Father would be too happy to see you molesting his daughter."

Jamie laughed as he replaced his mask. "You're probably right. I really do need to get back to school. I'll see you in a few days."

"I can't wait." Seville kept her smile up until Jamie left. Sitting down she wondered what she could do. A few minutes later a knock on her door sent her hurrying to answer it. Voldemort was standing outside, Chloe in his arms once more.

"Father." Seville stepped aside. "I thought you'd retired for the evening."

"I think I owe you another apology." Voldemort knew Seville wasn't going to be happy with him. "I overheard your conversation with Jamie."

Seville frowned. "You eavesdropped on us?"

"I had to know for sure if you could be trusted." Voldemort informed her.

Seville was angry and didn't bother to hide the fact. "And?"

"After what Abbott clarified and listening to your discussion with Jamie, I believe you are telling the truth." Voldemort watched his daughter's face carefully.

"Good." Seville folded her arms. "Because I am. I admit when I first found about you I wasn't exactly thrilled but you've given me no reason to believe that you have anything but my best interests at heart, except for today of course."

Voldemort sighed. "I really am sorry about that, Seville. But you have to put yourself in my shoes. I couldn't appear weak in front of my men and that is why you were treated no differently than anyone else who I believed had betrayed me would have been. If you'd have been me what would you have done?"

Seville looked defeated. "Exactly the same."

"I'm glad that you understand." Voldemort turned to the other reason he'd come to see Seville. "I wondered if you wanted Chloe for the night."

"I would." Seville took the little girl she regarded as a sister into her arms. "I take it she's going to be safe now."

"I wouldn't have harmed her." Voldemort had hoped that his empty threats would have been enough to make Remus co-operate.

“But you’ve killed other children.” Seville pointed out, as she carefully moved Chloe onto her shoulder.

“Muggle children.” Voldemort argued. “The only reason I attacked Harry and Jamie as babies was because they posed a significant threat to me. But I’ve never attacked a wizarding baby before or after the Potter children.”

“I’m just glad Chloe is alright.” Seville stroked the baby’s head. “Can I keep her?”

“You want Chloe for yourself?” Voldemort was a little shocked. “You’re only sixteen and still a fifth year.”

“I love her.” Seville did. “And Anna and Remus will obviously end up dead in the end.”

“You do have a point.” Voldemort wondered if Seville had thought about the repercussions of taking such a small baby on. “How do you think Jamie will feel about it?”

“Of course, you heard him propose, didn’t you?” Seville couldn’t believe she was being so bold in dealing with her Father.

“I did and I’d already told him that I approve of the match.” Voldemort could see Seville did love the girl as she gently rocked her.

“Jamie will do as he’s told.” Seville decided to use some of the power she knew she could wield. “He will eventually end up as my husband but at the end of the day I will always outrank him.”

Voldemort smiled proudly. “You really are my daughter.”

“Thank you.” Seville inclined her head at the compliment.

Voldemort knew that Seville was unlikely to back down from her request to take Chloe. “Very well, Chloe is yours to keep.”

Seville smiled at Voldemort. “Thank you, Father.”

"I am sorry about thinking you were involved." Voldemort kissed Seville on the forehead. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Father." Seville knew that if she had been anyone else except for his daughter, Voldemort would have been more suspicious and a little less likely to believe in her innocence. Heading into her bedroom she called out. "I need a house-elf."

After one appeared, Seville ordered what she'd need to take care of Chloe. She then kissed the little girl before placing her in the crib that the house-elf had hurriedly sorted out for her. "Don't worry little one; I'll take good care of you."

Seville ordered the house-elf to take care of the little girl while she showered. Re-entering the room, she dismissed the house-elf before dimming the lights and climbing into bed. As she lay there, she worried about how Remus and Dae were faring in the dungeons but she knew that she'd at least achieved securing Chloe's safety.

Midnight

Harry was now beside himself. "Dad's obviously been caught; he should have come back or sent word by now."

Lily knew Harry was right. "But why would Anna ask him to come if she knew it was a trap?"

Theo made a suggestion. "Perhaps she is on Voldemort's side as Sirius suggested."

"I don't believe it." Auri snapped. "Anna would never betray us."

"But my own brother already has." Harry pointed out. "Perhaps I should..."

Lily shook her head. "Absolutely not."

"We'll soon know." Blaise looked round the table at those seated there. "If Remus doesn't return and Anna is still headmistress of

Hogwarts, then we can do little except surmise she's on the Dark Lord's side."

Harry didn't want to believe Anna would betray them but knew that Blaise had a point. "I have to agree when you put it like that." Harry called Pasha. "Pasha, I know Dad asked you to stay in contact with Anna but under no circumstances are you to tell her anything if she reappears at Hogwarts. If she does, then let me know." Pasha had searched Hogwarts at Harry's request.

"Miss Anna came in twenty minutes ago, Master Harry. She had two men in white masks with her." Pasha was pleased that her vocabulary had improved thanks to French's teachings.

Blaise looked apologetically at Harry. "I'm sorry, Harry but she's returned safely with two Death Eaters in tow. What else are we expected to think except that she's on his side?"

Harry hid distress; he felt worse about Anna that he had done about Jamie. "You're right." He looked at Pasha. "Chloe and Seville?"

"They weren't there, Master Harry." Pasha had looked.

Harry frowned. "Why would Anna return without Chloe and Seville?"

"Because Chloe would be safe with Seville." Pansy theorized. "There's probably nowhere safer than Villa Laurifer; not even Hogwarts."

"I don't know." Harry was tired and couldn't think straight. "Something just doesn't seem right."

Lily stood up. "Look it's getting late. We'll take this up again tomorrow. I don't think there's anything we can do now." She then waited for everyone to leave. "Harry, you might just have to face the fact that Anna has betrayed us."

"I don't think she'd have done that to Dad." Harry rubbed his eyes.

Lily thought differently. "We've been wrong before and it looks as if we've been wrong again."

"Knowing that doesn't make it hurt any less." Harry let Lily enfold him in a hug, before pulling back. "Are you going to be alright?"

Lily shook her head. "No, not really." Lily knew that the minute she reached her room that she'd break down. "But I can't let go of the slight hope that Remus might still be alive."

Harry doubted that Remus was but, like Lily, he wasn't quite ready to admit to himself that his Dad had gone. Harry escorted Lily up to her room before kissing her on the cheek. He then made his way to the dueling room and warded it, before taking out his anger and misery out on the room.

Second half of this chapter: I'm not sure when this will be up but it's going to be the big showdown, or at least the start of it.

Chapter 74: Opening Moves

April 13th 1998

Harry was waiting for Anna when she entered her sitting room.

“Harry!” Anna jumped, not expecting to find anyone in the room.

“Sorry to barge in like this, but I was wondering whether you’d seen Dad.” Harry knew very well that she had.

“I saw him yesterday. But he left after telling me that things were going as well as expected.” Anna informed him.

“And he didn’t say where he was going?” Harry kept his gaze firmly on Anna’s face.

“No.” Anna looked concerned. “Is something wrong?”

“He didn’t return.” Harry pushed away from the wall. “I was hoping you might have known something.”

“I’m really sorry but I don’t.” Anna went into her kitchenette, and turned her back on Harry. “What do you think has happened to him?”

“I’d guess somehow Voldemort has got his hands on him.” Harry watched Anna put cocoa powder and then milk into two mugs. “Which is a bloody nuisance.”

“What do you mean?” Anna tapped the side of a mug of the liquid and passed it to Harry, who simply put it down beside him after he’d walked back into the sitting room and sat down.

“We’d just gotten our plans finalized for attacking Voldemort when he takes over the Ministry.” Harry told her. “And Dad was an integral part of them.”

“Will you change them?” Anna sipped her hot chocolate.

Harry shook his head. "Absolutely not; I couldn't see Dad telling Voldemort anything no matter what he does to him. I'll just get someone else to take Dad's place. "

"Good idea." Anna relaxed. "What have you got planned?"

"A full frontal attack as Voldemort arrives, and then hit him from behind as well. I've got someone watching the entrance at all times so we can be ready." Harry sneezed and knocked over his hot chocolate. "Shit. I'm sorry, Anna. I should be more careful."

"No harm done." Anna went to pull out her wand only for Harry to have already withdrawn his.

"I've got it." Harry tapped his wand on his knee after cleaning up the mess. "Where are Seville and Chloe? I was surprised not to find them here."

"Lord Voldemort wanted Seville to stay with him for a few days. She's got Chloe with her. I've had a bit of a cold, and didn't want to risk Chloe catching it." Anna responded.

Harry's eyebrows shot up. "You're not worried about Chloe being around Voldemort?"

"I can't see him hurting Chloe if she's with his daughter, can you?" Anna felt as if her head was going to explode as her brain was screaming something totally different than what was coming out of her mouth.

"Probably not." Harry stood up. "I really must get back. I don't want Mum having a meltdown if I don't return safely."

"I'll see you soon." Anna stood up to embrace Harry, only for him to apparate out before she could get anywhere near him.

Potter Estate

Harry walked into the room where everyone had gathered. "Anna's definitely up to something. She's even let Seville take Chloe with her to Villa Laurifer."

"Sorry, Harry." Blaise hated being right, particularly in this instance.

"It's nothing we can't deal with." Harry rubbed his temples. "We just have to wait and see if she tells Voldemort that we're not going to change our plans."

Nia put her arm around Harry. "We'll soon find out when Lily returns."

Harry hadn't wanted Lily to accompany him in her Animagus form but it had been the only way both she and Nia would agree to Harry stepping foot inside Hogwarts at all. "I'm going back to the travel room."

Everyone watched a very stressed and tired Harry head back the way he had come from.

Hogwarts

From the darkness of a secluded corner, Berus watched silently as Anna headed for the fireplace. "Jamie Potter."

Jamie's head appeared in the flames. "Can you come through?" Anna asked.

A few minutes later Jamie was brushing himself off in Anna's office. "What is it?"

"Harry was here." Anna informed him.

"Didn't you try and hold him?" Jamie snapped. "I thought my orders were quite clear."

"Of course I did." Anna snapped back. "He accidentally knocked over the drugged drink I'd made him."

"You should have just stunned him." Jamie knew that was what he'd have done.

"He's a lot faster than you think." Anna sat down by the fire. "I consider myself quick but he had his wand out and had cleaned up the spilt drink before I'd even drawn mine."

"Did you find anything out?" Jamie was impatient to get back to what he'd been doing when Anna had firecalled him.

"He's got a spy in the Ministry who's watching out for the Dark Lord." Anna informed him. "He's also planning a full frontal attack with a rearguard; Remus was supposed to be a major part of it."

"And he's not considering changing his plans?" Jamie was suspicious. "I know I would in his position."

"He doesn't believe Remus will break." Anna wanted to get up and slap Jamie as he sat there with a smug look on his face.

"I can understand why Harry would think that." Jamie had been shown the memory of Remus being tortured by Sirius, and how he'd refused to kill Anna no matter what Sirius had done to him.

"Will you tell Lord Voldemort?" Anna asked.

"Yes." Jamie knew his activities would have to wait. He smirked at Anna. "I bet this hurts doesn't it? Knowing you've got to tell me what Harry's doing and having no choice in the matter."

"You know very well it does." Anna snarled at him. "And how would you like it if your daughter was being held to ransom?"

"That would never happen. Unlike you, I'm totally loyal to my Master." Jamie smiled as he turned towards the fireplace. "I'll say hello to Seville and Chloe for you."

"Leave them alone." Anna revisited her wish to slap Jamie, only this time she upgraded it to breaking his nose, or better still, his neck. "They've got nothing to do with this."

"I know that." Jamie slipped his mask on. "Oh, and by the way, Seville's accepted my marriage proposal."

Anna was shocked. "But..."

"Sadly I doubt you'll be getting an invitation to the wedding." Jamie couldn't resist telling her what Voldemort had planned. "As you'll be joining Uncle Remus for dinner next month, if you know what I mean."

In the darkness, Berus kept still until Jamie had apparated out. Only once Anna had made her way into her sitting room did the snake slither out before transforming. Unholstering her wand, Lily coughed.

Anna scowled and turned back into the room. "Jamie, what do...?"

She didn't get to say anything else as Lily stunned her. Tying her up, she apparated them both to the Potter Estate.

Harry shot to his feet as Lily appeared in the travel room. "Maman, why have you brought Anna here?"

"You were right yesterday with your belief that something isn't right." Lily then gave a bright smile. "And Remus is definitely still alive."

"How do you know that?" Harry cast Mobilicorpus on Anna and maneuvered her to the dungeons. Given her strength and speed, he didn't want her free when questioning her.

"Jamie told Anna she's going to be killed by him next full moon." Lily shuddered at the thought. "I'll explain when everyone's here and we can try and work out if Anna's co-operating solely because of Chloe or whether there are other factors in play."

One hour later Anna finished telling everyone what had happened. "Remus broke down when faced with Chloe. He told the Dark Lord everything."

Georgie stuck her tongue out at Auri. "I told you Dad wouldn't let one of us get hurt, no matter what he said."

"You wouldn't be saying that if you'd seen him torturing me when commanded to do so by Voldemort." Harry wryly told his sister.

Georgie's face fell. "So if that's true, why didn't he let You-Know-Who hurt Chloe?"

"I don't honestly know." Anna told her. "I expected him to tell Voldemort to go ahead."

"Well, at least we know what Remus told Voldemort; not that it's of any use now. Remus would have known that we'd change the plan if he was caught." Peri was worried about Remus; as far as she knew she'd already lost Dae. "But what we have no idea of, is what Voldemort's got planned."

"Just like he's got no idea of what we've got planned." Harry scratched his head. "There has to be some way of finding out what's going on."

"I've an idea." Theo had been part of the team who Remus had assigned to strategy. "Potter thought it was a good idea to use someone to impersonate your sister; I'd guess at Abbott. Why not use the same technique?"

Blaise disagreed. "Why not just rip the information from her mind?"

"Because I don't want Voldemort changing his plans when he finds out Abbott can't even spell her name because I damaged her." Harry pointed out. "I think the polyjuice idea is the way to go."

Anna also thought the idea had merit. "I should easily be able to acquire a hair from Potter. What about polyjuice though? It's not as if I have it lying around at school."

"I think I know where I can get some." Harry stood up. "Anna, you need to get back to school and carry on as if you're still under the influence of the liquid Imperius. I'm going to see my father-in-law."

Anna hugged Harry. "I'm so sorry about what I tried to do to you."

“Just let Pasha know when you’ve got the hairs and when you expect Jamie to be absent.” Harry kissed Anna on the cheek. “And be careful.”

Anna was porkeyed out of the very dimly lit dungeon. Even though she was in what she assumed was Harry’s home, she’d asked him not to let her into the secret of exactly where she was. She didn’t want to take the chance that she might jeopardize everything. She’d also told him not to tell her of his plans for the Ministry until just before if he needed her.

Harry let out a sigh. “So at least Dad is still alive.”

“But it doesn’t sound as if Voldemort has a particularly nice job lined up for him.” Narcissa shivered. “He’s obviously going to use Remus to execute anyone who’s betrayed him. You can almost guarantee you’re on the list.”

“That’s probably Dad’s worst nightmare.” Harry opened the door. “I’ll be back later.”

Snape Manor

Harry hugged Severus. “I’m sorry I haven’t been able to get over before now.”

“What’s been happening?” Severus sat down opposite Harry.

Harry gave him the main highlights. “So I’m in need of some polyjuice potion. Do you have any?”

“I have a base. It’ll take me a few days to finish it off.” Severus was glad of something to do. “Harry, I’m going to the Ministry with you when Voldemort makes his move.”

“Severus, I’m not trying to be difficult but you have a disadvantage that no-one else has.” Harry pointed out.

"That may be so." Severus felt his eye patch as he spoke to Harry. "But I'm still faster and stronger than a lot of people you have going. I need to be there to see him die."

Harry knew that if had been him he would have wanted the same. "Okay." Harry tossed him a coin. "This will heat up and shake when Voldemort makes his move. I'll let you know beforehand where I need you." Harry looked up at the ceiling. "I'm going to see Hermione before I leave."

"We're still searching, Harry." Severus had brought Hermione home with him as he knew that Harry was too busy to take care of his daughter, no matter how much Harry had insisted otherwise.

"As are we." Harry hugged Severus again. "I'll see you in a few days."

April 19th 1998

Anna hadn't been able to get hold of a hair she knew was definitely Jamie's. Even Lily hadn't been able to help; thanks to house-elf efficiency, Jamie's rooms at both of the Black houses had been spotless. They decided therefore to go directly to the source. Anna had informed Harry that Slytherin had a quidditch practice planned for that day and Harry had lain in wait for Jamie before ambushing him. Making sure his brother was well and truly stunned, Harry locked the door of the classroom he'd dragged Jamie into, before pulling out a hair and dropping it in the polyjuice. Grimacing, Harry swallowed the viscous potion.

Five minutes later, Harry let himself into the Head suite to find Hannah reading a book by the fireplace. "Hi Hannah."

"Jamie." Hannah's face lit up as she put down the book. "I thought you were at quidditch practice."

"I changed my mind." Harry lied. "What are you reading?"

Hannah blushed and hid the book behind her back. "I'd rather not say."

Harry hoped that Jamie had told Hannah who he really was, and held out his hand authoritatively. "Book, please."

Hannah reluctantly handed the book over. "It's just something all the girls are reading."

Harry smirked as he read the title aloud. "Valentine and the Demon Wizard." Harry threw the book onto the sofa. "It's a bit tacky, isn't it?"

"The picture sort of reminded me of you." Hannah blushed again.

Harry bit back a groan. He knew from Auri that Hannah had some sort of crush on his brother. "That's nice of you to say so, but I don't really see it."

Hannah patted the sofa. "You can sit here with me if you want to."

"Not right now." Ignoring Hannah's hurt look, Harry sat in the chair. "I have something to ask of you."

"I'd do anything for you; you know that." Hannah responded eagerly.

Tamping down on his hatred of the girl who'd contributed to Hermione being in the state she was in now, Harry smiled at her. "I do."

Hannah fluttered her eyelashes. "Are you sure you wouldn't like to sit next to me?"

Harry hid his abhorrence of the girl and moved to sit by Hannah, just about stopping himself from flinching as she put her hand on his thigh. "I want you to accompany me when we take over the Ministry."

Hannah looked excited. "Really?"

"Of course." Harry took Hannah's hand in his to stop it travelling further up his leg. "After what you did to help capture Lupin and trap his wife, I'd say you've earned it."

“I thought you’d prefer to have Seville with you.” Hannah was jealous of the girl. Jamie had told her that he’d proposed but that marrying Seville was a political move.

“Now why would you think that?” Harry tightened his grip on Hannah’s hand to stop her pulling it free.

“I know you said that your engagement is just strictly business, and I know I said I wouldn’t get all upset over it again, but she is your fiancée.” Hannah wanted Jamie to reassure her.

“Hannah, I can tell you, hand on heart, that my feelings for Seville are more like those I’d have for my sister.” Harry answered honestly.

“How do you feel about me?” Hannah blushed as she asked.

“Again, hand on heart, I can genuinely say that my feelings for you are far from being those of a friend or a brother.” Harry knew that Hannah would misinterpret his words.

“Oh, Jamie.” Hannah felt her heart speed up at his words, and she stood up and tugged at his hand. “You’ve no idea how that makes me feel.”

“Hannah, sit down.” Harry didn’t want to go anywhere.

“I thought that perhaps we could, you know.” Hannah knew that she was blushing again but she liked being held by Jamie as they made love.

“All in good time.” Harry was disgusted by what Hannah’s invitation obviously meant his brother had been doing. “Right now, we have things to discuss.”

Hannah was thrilled that Jamie wanted to share things with her. “Will there be a large crowd to watch the ceremony?”

Harry shrugged. “That’s yet to be decided.” Harry wondered if Hannah knew when the so-called ceremony was to be held. “I do

know there's going to be some sort of ball afterwards; I could quite easily get you an invitation."

Her eyes shining, Hannah nodded her head enthusiastically. "You'll be going with Seville, won't you?"

"I have to." Harry looked regretful. "Once she leaves though, I was wondering if you'd care to join me for a late night rendezvous; then again, maybe not. I wouldn't want our beloved headmistress having anything to complain about if you can't get up for lessons the next day."

Hannah frowned. "Have you forgotten? The first is on a Friday; we don't have classes the next day."

Harry now had what he needed. "Pasha."

The little house-elf appeared. "Master Harry?"

Hannah went to pull out her wand, only to find that Harry already had his withdrawn. Harry waved a finger at the girl. "Not so fast, Abbott."

"You sneaky bastard." Hannah snarled.

"Just taking a leaf out of your own book." Harry didn't take his eyes off Hannah while he addressed the house-elf. "Can you bring Craig here? I need him to do a little obliviation for me."

Hannah gave Harry a look of hatred. "You won't win."

"That's a matter of opinion." Harry stood up, still keeping his wand trained on the girl. "Craig should hopefully be here soon so I don't have to look at your nauseating face for much longer."

Hannah couldn't attack Harry physically, so she resorted to words. "How's your precious friend? Dead yet?"

"She's just fine." Harry wasn't going to admit that Hermione was still effectively in a suspended coma. "And, even though you won't

remember me telling you this, if I come across you in the Ministry, I'm going to make you pay for your part in injuring her."

Hannah blanched a little at Harry's words; even though she hadn't seen Harry fight in a duel before, she'd heard about his prowess. "You don't frighten me."

"I think you're lying." Harry could see that he'd shaken the girl. "Either way, I don't give a damn."

Craig suddenly appeared with Pasha. "Harry, what do you need me to do?"

Hannah realized what Craig was. "You're a healer. You've sworn an oath to heal, not harm."

"But I'm not going to be harming you, and you're not my patient. And if you were, I can guarantee that you wouldn't make it through the night; even healers make mistakes." Craig looked disgustedly at the girl. "Obliviate."

Harry told Craig what Hannah needed to believe, before roughly shoving Hannah backwards on the sofa and placing the book in her hands. Craig turned to Harry. "Where's Jamie?"

"Abandoned classroom. I think a disillusionment spell, Craig; I don't want anyone seeing you." Harry waited for Craig to disillusion himself, then he opened the door. "After you."

As Harry stood in the doorway, he turned his wand on Hannah. "Evervate."

He then closed the door behind him. Hannah became fully aware, thinking that she must have dropped off while reading and, after finding her page again, she settled down to finish reading her book.

Harry made his way up the corridor only to run into several of the sixth years who were in the quidditch team. "Sorry guys; I lost track of time."

“Not a problem.” Rudy Bascombe told him. “We barely bothered. We just ran through the usual maneuvers. I mean, it’s not as if Hufflepuff are going to prevent us from taking the Cup.”

Harry laughed nastily at Rudy's comments and the other quidditch players joined in. “I’ll see you later.”

Harry then made his way to the room where he’d hidden Jamie. “Enervate.”

Jamie was a little shocked to find himself staring at himself. “What the hell?”

“Hello, Potter. I can’t say I like my look, because I don’t.” Harry crossed his arms and sat on a desk. “Just so you know; it’s me, Harry. I wouldn’t want you to die not knowing who’d killed you.”

Jamie wondered why Harry had impersonated him. “What are you playing at?”

“Not telling.” Harry smirked. “Now before I kill you, do you have any last wishes?”

Jamie began to shake as he thought Harry was being serious. “You wouldn’t dare.”

“I killed Sirius, why not you as well?” Harry enjoyed watching his brother sweat.

“Dad’s dead?” Jamie had known that it was likely but he still couldn’t quite believe it. “There’s no way you could have beaten him.”

“But I did.” Harry turned to the space beside. “Tell him.”

Craig dropped the disillusionment spell. “He’s telling the truth. I’d like to say I’d certified the body as dead but there were only ashes left by the time Harry and Luna had finished with him, so I was denied the pleasure.”

Jamie felt like crying but wouldn’t give into his tears. “You won’t win.”

Harry sighed. "Yeah, yeah. So I've been told." Harry got off the desk and turned his wand on Jamie. "Last wishes?"

Jamie started to cry. Harry felt nothing but disdain for him. "I'll tell you what. As you're family, even though I wish you weren't, I'm willing to cut you a break."

"What do you want?" Jamie could hear his voice shaking.

"Give me the horcrux, and I'll spare your life." Harry grinned at his brother.

"The Dark Lord will kill me if I give it to you." Jamie stammered out.

"And I'll kill you, if you don't." Harry calmly told him.

"Mum would never forgive you." Voldemort had told Jamie that Lily was still probably alive.

The snake that Craig had around his waist slithered down and onto the ground before transforming. "I think I would." Lily stood facing Jamie.

Jamie looked pleadingly at his mother. "You wouldn't really let Harry kill me, would you? Mum...?" Jamie's voice trailed off at the end as he looked into the hard, implacable face of his mother.

"You are no longer my son." Lily wanted to weep at her words, knowing that she didn't actually mean them. "If Harry was to kill you, he'd be doing the world a favor."

Jamie couldn't stop the tears at the hurtful words spoken by Lily, before becoming angry. "I knew that Harry would eventually take everything from me."

Harry winced as he suddenly began to change, before resuming his usual appearance. "That feels better." Harry then put his arm around Lily. "You're right, Jamie. I have taken everything; the title you thought would be yours, the properties, the money, our mother, and

most satisfyingly, I'm going to take your position in the wizarding world. You're not the Boy Who Lived. I am."

"You can't be." Jamie didn't believe him.

"It doesn't really matter if you believe me or not, because your time has run out." Harry resumed his stance above Jamie, his wand drawn. "Avada..."

"No." Jamie screamed out. "I'll give it to you but I need you to swear that none of you will kill me if I do."

"I swear that none of us will kill you today if you do exactly as you are told and hand over the horcrux; if you don't all bets are off." Harry disarmed Jamie before releasing him. "By the way, there are wards over this room, so I shouldn't bother to try and apparate. If you attempt it, I'll kill you just for trying."

Jamie reached around his neck and dropped the silver chain he was wearing onto the table. "That's it."

"Get over there." Harry indicated the corner of the room with his wand.

Jamie moved away, and Craig pulled out a silver bowl and holy water. Harry then stepped over to where Jamie was standing and erected a shield over them. Craig and Lily then went through the same process she and Remus had with the ring. Jamie cringed as screams issued from the bowl before the bowl exploded into thousands of tiny metal shards.

Lily checked the chain. "It's clean."

Harry dropped the shield and walked over to the pair, before picking the chain up and throwing it at Jamie. "Put it on."

Jamie did as he was told. "Now what?"

"Craig, if you would." Harry stepped aside.

Craig turned his wand on Jamie. "Oblivate." A few moments later he stopped. "The spell isn't working."

Harry scowled at Jamie. "Drop your shields."

Jamie shook his head. "No." He looked smugly at the trio. "And you can't kill me for refusing."

"True." Harry looked just as smug. "But I can do this. Crucio."

Lily had to hold herself still as Jamie screamed. Harry dropped the spell. "Now let's try again, shall we. Drop the shields."

While Jamie knew he was skilled with the Imperius curse and mind arts, he was aware that Harry was most adept at using the Cruciatus curse. "You're not really leaving me much choice."

"Actually I am." Harry tapped his wand against his leg. "You can either do as I ask or I can give you a little more of the same."

"I'll do it." Jamie lowered his shields and looked at Craig.

Craig raised his wand again. "Oblivate." This time he was able to do what was necessary.

Harry stunned Jamie before calling out. "Pasha."

The small house-elf appeared. "Yes Master Harry?"

"Take Potter and dump him at the bottom of the staircase on the third floor before waking him." Harry ordered the house-elf. "And, Pasha, thank you."

"You is welcome, Master Harry." Pasha grabbed the boy and vanished.

Lily let out a long breath. "Did you have to do that to him?"

"He'd have done the same to me if our positions were reversed." Harry rubbed the back of his neck. "The only difference is that I underpowered my spell; something Potter wouldn't have done."

Craig was curious. "Would you really have killed him?"

"No. At the end of the day, he's still my brother." Harry knew that he would find it hard to kill Jamie despite what he'd done. "We'd best get out of here. I know when Voldemort's going to take over the Ministry."

1st May 1998

Harry looked up from the forms he was filling in as alarms began sounding throughout the building. "I think that's our signal."

Kingsley put down his quill. "Let's go."

Nym and Pium came running in, several others behind them. "Where's everyone else?"

"I told them to meet us on the ninth floor." Harry dropped the glamour he'd assumed and pulled the galleon he had in his pocket out, before casting a spell on it. "Everyone's been alerted now."

"Then what are we waiting for?" Kingsley began to run, the other two hurrying after him.

Villa Laurifer

Anna could feel her heart pounding as she was apparated into Villa Laurifer. Being nudged forward she followed two of the Death Eaters into the ballroom. It was almost deserted, with little more than fifteen or so Death Eaters sitting around.

Magnus, one of the few Death Eaters not wearing their masks, walked over to the group. "What is she doing here?"

"Our Lord asked that she be brought here and held for his return." The Death Eater at the front of the group informed Magnus.

“Very well.” Magnus looked at the large group. “It takes eight of you to escort one woman?”

The tallest Death Eater at the back of the line shook his head. “No. We’ve also been told to escort Lord Voldemort’s daughter to the Ministry. He has requested she join him.”

Magnus had wondered why Seville hadn’t gone with Lord Voldemort in the first place. “I will accompany you.”

The Death Eater stepped back into line as they headed out of the room; four of them then peeling off towards the dungeons and the other four up the stairway with Magnus leading the way.

Seville looked up at the knock at her door and ran a hand over Robert’s head. “Stay here, Robert. Auntie Seville will be back in a moment.”

Magnus bowed low as Seville opened the door. “Lady Voldemort, your father has requested your presence.”

Seville hated the new title her father had bestowed upon her. “Very well, let me just get the children’s cloaks and we’ll be along.”

“Children?” Magnus couldn’t believe Seville was going to take the children with her.

“Yes, children.” Seville snapped. “Unless you’re trying to tell me that the Ministry won’t be secure and that my father hasn’t succeeded.” Seville hoped to try and get away once she was at the Ministry. She wouldn’t have taken the children but she didn’t trust Voldemort not to hurt Chloe if she left her behind, and it would have looked suspicious if she’d only taken Chloe, and left Robert.

“Of course not, my Lady.” Magnus backed off. “We will wait outside.”

The group waited for a few minutes and Seville came out of the room carrying Chloe. One of the Death Eaters stepped forward; it was obviously a woman. “Would you like me to take her, my Lady?”

Seville smiled. "Thank you."

Chloe was duly passed over and Seville held out her hand to Robert. "Be a good boy and hold on tightly to Auntie Seville's hand, okay?"

Robert grasped Seville's hand tightly. "Robert holds on."

"Good boy." Seville walked slowly as Robert couldn't walk very fast and the group made their way downstairs.

As they came upon the ballroom, the other four Death Eaters returned, one of them being supported by one of his colleagues. Magnus frowned. "What happened?"

"The woman suddenly went crazy and smashed into Renfield; she almost knocked him out." The Death Eater supporting Renfield sounded amused.

Magnus shook his head. "Rookies."

The group made their way into the apparition room and Seville looked at the group expectantly. "I'm not able to apparate."

One of the Death Eaters immediately took Robert from her and both Magnus and one of the others held out their arms. Seville didn't really care for Magnus and chose to take the arm of the other Death Eater. Magnus wasn't happy about it. "I'd prefer to take care of you myself."

Seville didn't want to touch him. "Thank you, Magnus but I am perfectly happy where I am."

Not wishing to argue with her, Magnus put on his mask and apparated away; the others leaving only moments after him.

Arriving at the Ministry, Magnus looked round. There was no-one else there with him. After waiting a few minutes, he immediately apparated back to Villa Laurifer. There was no-one standing there either.

Hurrying out of the room and towards the dungeon level, he was furious to find the four guards that had been on duty lying on the floor

of Longbottom's cell. Longbottom was nowhere to be seen. Knowing he was going to pay for his mistake, Magnus killed the four guards before turning around and heading back towards the apparition point. He would tell Voldemort himself, rather than waiting for him to find out.

Hogwarts

Seville looked around in surprise as she found herself in Anna's office. "What's going on?"

The tallest Death Eater lowered Renfield onto a chair and pulled off his mask. "Hi Sev!"

"George." Seville threw herself at George and hugged him.

Anna pulled off her own mask. "I'm sorry but we don't have time for this."

Katie handed Chloe over to Anna, before revealing herself. "I agree."

Robert, not knowing what was going on, started crying. "Want Mummy."

"Come here, sweetie." Seville held out arms to Robert who went willingly into them.

Anna, who by now was standing by the fireplace, her daughter nestled safely in one arm, smiled at the group. "Thank you."

"You're welcome." George reached into pocket and pulled out a small brown mouse and an earthworm before placing them on the floor.

Clinging to Seville, Robert gaped as the two creatures transformed into two Death Eaters.

George then slid his mask back on. "Come on, we've got a party to crash."

Anna waited for the group to leave before invoking a lockdown of the school. She then made a school-wide announcement asking

everyone to return to their common rooms. She knew that once every student had made their way there, Hogwarts would seal the common rooms, ensuring the safety of the children inside.

Seville sat down, placing Robert on her knee. "Anna, where is everyone else?"

Renfield finally pulled off his mask. "Well I'm here."

Seville burst into tears at the sight of her brother. "Nev."

"It's really me." Neville smiled.

Seville knew now why Voldemort had refused to let her see Neville again. "You look terrible."

"After you were taken from my cell, my rations dried up." Neville knew that they had intended to starve him to death. "If it hadn't been for the fact that water ran down the walls at the back of my cell, I think I would probably have died long before now." Neville grinned at Seville and tried to soften the blow of his words. "And I'd be a lot stinkier!"

Seville was still horrified. "Nev, where's Dae? Is he still alive?"

"Dae?" Anna nearly dropped Chloe in shock at Seville's comment.

"They took him this morning." Neville had felt lonelier than he could have thought possible when they'd taken Dae away. Even though Dae had done nothing but constantly mumble, he'd at least been company in the dank, dark bowels of the house.

"Oh Merlin." Anna sat down opposite Neville. "Dae's been alive all this time?"

Neville looked at Seville before responding. "He has, but he's not the same person he was."

Seville could see that Anna was in shock. "Is Pasha still around?"

Anna nodded numbly. "She's in my rooms."

Seville called out. "Pasha."

"Miss Seville. I am here." Pasha smiled shyly at Seville.

Seville was glad to see the little house-elf. "Can you take Chloe for us?"

Pasha made her way over to Anna and took the little girl from the unresisting woman. Anna still couldn't believe Dae was alive, and tears started to make their way down her cheeks. Seville turned to Robert. "This is my brother, Neville. Can you sit with him while I make Auntie Anna feel better?"

Robert looked nervously at Neville who smiled at the boy and held out his arms. "You're a big boy aren't you?"

At the praise, Robert made his way over to Neville and climbed onto his knee, before beginning to chatter happily to the male who'd given him such a compliment.

Anna couldn't stop shaking. "What happened to him?"

Neville looked up from talking to Robert. "Lestrangle tortured him with the Cruciatus to the point his mind broke; at least I think that's what happened."

Anna buried her face in her hands, until anger began to take over from her despair and she climbed to her feet. "I'm going to rip that bitch apart."

Seville shook her head. "You can't go anywhere, Anna. We need you here."

Anna's emotions warred with her logic; her logic eventually winning out, and she sat back down. "If she doesn't die today, I swear I will kill her myself." Anna had never once wanted to hurt anyone quite like this before but finding out about Dae had angered her more than she could have thought possible.

"I know." Seville got up. "I think a glass of scotch is called for."

"You're too young." Anna snapped.

"Not for me, for you." Seville wandered over to the wall and, tapping on it, she waited for it to open. After pouring out a scotch for Anna, she also poured out a water for Neville. "You might want this."

Robert looked hopefully at Seville. "Me want a drink, please."

Seville smiled at the boy. "Wait here." She made her way into Anna's rooms and in the kitchenette found some orange juice which she brought back out to the boy. "Neville, I know you're probably hungry but I think Madam Pomfrey should check you over before you eat anything."

After drinking the scotch, Anna stood up. "Thanks Seville. I feel a little better now. Finding out about Dae was a bit of a shock but if he's still alive, then there's always hope."

Seville hugged Anna. "There is. Now will you please tell me what's going on?"

"In a moment." Anna removed the lockdown on her office and called out. "French."

"Miss Anna." French appeared. "What can I do for you?"

"I've just found out that Dae is still alive." Anna informed the stunned looking house-elf. "We think he's been taken to the Ministry."

French didn't say a word and simply vanished; returning moments later with Dae. "He was alone."

Anna threw herself at Dae, only to step back as he didn't respond to her. "Dae?"

Dae just stood there mumbling. Anna gently touched his face. "I'll take care of you." She led him into her sitting room and sat him down. "Stay here."

Anna made her way back into her office. "I'm going to lift the lockdown on the infirmary. I'll be back in a few minutes."

As soon as she'd done it, French grabbed her arm, transporting her to Madam Pomfrey's office.

Poppy jumped as Anna appeared in front of her. "Anna, what's wrong?"

"I need your help." Anna waited for Poppy to grab her bag. French then took hold of both women and transported them directly into Anna's sitting room.

Poppy hid her horror at the sight of Dae and set to work on him. "He's definitely suffering from malnutrition, and he's got a lot of old bruises, broken bones and cuts that don't appear to have been healed."

Poppy pulled out several potions and started to dose Dae, who obediently swallowed them before returning to his mumbling.

"What about his mind?" Anna stroked Dae's hair as she asked, ignoring the tangled and dirty state of it.

"I'm no expert but he seems to have retreated into himself." Poppy then cast a cleansing spell before beginning to cast healing spells on Dae's injuries. "Do you know what happened?"

"Neville Longbottom said he was subjected to the Cruciatus." Anna continued to touch Dae, barely able to believe he was there with her.

Poppy closed her eyes for a moment at the thought of what Dae must have gone through to end up in this state. "He's definitely going to be mentally impaired then."

Anna felt her heart sink. "Is there nothing we can do?"

"I'm sorry but as far as I'm aware, in cases like this there isn't." Poppy felt sorry for Anna who obviously cared for Dae. "This must be so hard for you after losing Remus."

Anna gave Poppy a brief smile before turning to French who'd been hovering in the background. "Can you help him bathe and find him some fresh clothes? My bathroom is the second door on the left."

French took hold of Dae and vanished. Anna shook herself and turned to Poppy. "Neville is in my office. He's in almost as bad shape physically as Dae."

Poppy bustled into Anna's office following Anna, who once again reinvoked the lockdown on the infirmary and her office. "You've got quite the gathering." She then smiled at Robert who was sitting on Neville's lap. "And who might you be, young man?"

Robert smiled shyly. "Robert."

"Well, Robert, I have a chocolate frog for you." Poppy withdrew one from her pocket; she usually kept a supply, mainly for the first years. "If I give it to you, will you sit with Seville while I take a look at Neville? He hasn't been very well."

Not being allowed much chocolate by Bella, Robert's eyes lit up. "Thank you."

Seville took Robert who was trying to hold onto his squirming frog, and watched Poppy deal with her brother.

Poppy handed over a few potions and a salve. "The salve is for those bruises."

Seville frowned. "Bruises?"

Neville looked sheepishly at her. "The guards occasionally used me for target practice."

Seville felt guilty. "Neville, I didn't know."

"I know you didn't." Neville knew that Seville couldn't have done anything for him if she had known.

Anna then briefly explained to the three of them what had been happening.

Poppy was shocked to learn that both Lily and Remus were still alive, and she wondered about Anna's relationship with Dae. "So Harry and his group are at the Ministry now?"

Anna nodded. "It's their only chance to take Voldemort out."

Poppy picked up her bag. "I need to get there. They're probably going to need medical assistance."

Anna was touched by Poppy's offer. "It's okay, Poppy. Craig Delaney has that under control. He and St. Mungo's will be standing by."

Frustrated, but understanding, Poppy relaxed. "I don't have any patients so I'm in no rush to return to the infirmary. I'm going to stay here with you if you don't mind. Now I know what's happening I think I would go mad..." Here Poppy cringed a little as she thought about Dae. "...if I was all alone."

"Let's go into my sitting room and I'll get Pasha to get us a cup of tea." Anna picked Neville up easily and placed him on the sofa. She smiled at the boy. "When French has finished bathing Dae, I'll ask him to do the same for you."

Neville blushed. "I think I can manage."

Poppy agreed with Anna. "I don't think so, young man. If you don't want French to assist you, I can always help."

Mortified, Neville shook his head. "I think French will do fine."

Anna then went into the bedroom and, after relieving Pasha of her daughter, instructed the house-elf to make tea or whatever else everyone else wanted.

She then returned to the room to wait for her galleon to let her know that it was safe to come out of lockdown.

The Ministry

Harry knelt down and checked Leo. "Dammit."

"Do you think Voldemort has what he came for?" Narcissa knew that only three people knew where the Elder Wand was kept; Leo being one of them.

"I don't know." Harry stood back up and he heard footsteps behind him.

Nic drew to a halt at the sight of his son on the floor. "Is he?"

"I'm so sorry, Nic." Harry watched as a spasm of grief crossed Nic's face.

"Wait here." Nic put his hand on the wall at the side of the elevator and disappeared. He reappeared a few minutes later. "It's gone."

"That answers the question of whether Voldemort has what he came for." Harry knew that their carefully crafted plan was already starting to unravel. "Why would Leo give up the wand?"

Nic went white. "Peri."

The group ran to Peri's office to find her lying motionless on the floor. "Oh no." Nic knelt down by his wife and let out a sigh of relief. "She's breathing."

Harry put a hand on his shoulder. "Get her out of here, Nic."

"It's my duty to stay." Nic was torn.

"You've already lost two sons; don't lose your wife as well." Harry knew that Nic's concentration wouldn't be what it should be. "Your mind won't be on the job if you stay."

Nic knew that Harry was right. "Good luck." He then disappeared with Peri.

Harry hurried out of the room trying not to look at Leo as he passed him. "We need to get into the main area on this floor."

"Follow me." Lily still had clearance for every level of the Ministry as it had never been revoked.

Harry and the others with him found themselves standing in a circular room with twelve plain, black, handleless door set at equal intervals. "Now what?"

"We need to find the Death Chamber room. I think that's where You-Know-Who will have gone." Arthur suggested.

Harry aimed his wand at a random door. Expecting the door to open, everyone was surprised when the room began to spin round and all twelve doors opened at once, sucking the members of the group inside different rooms.

Harry picked himself up from the floor. Around him, five of the others who'd been standing closest to him were also doing the same.

Voldemort stood on the far side of the room, Bella and a masked Jamie flanking him. "How nice of you to join us."

Before Harry could move towards him, he felt a wand sticking in his neck. Judging from the noises around him, everyone else had found themselves in the same position. He knew that there hadn't been anyone behind them when they'd been drawn into the room.

Voldemort smirked as he watched his men disarm the small group. "Contrary to what people believe, there are a lot more Animagi out there than you'd believe; particularly quite a lot of insect Animagi."

Harry knew then that the reason he hadn't seen anyone was because they had been in their Animagi forms. Harry tried to pull free, only for the Death Eater holding him to dig her wand deeper into his neck. "You're going nowhere, Lupin."

Harry recognized her voice. "Fama!"

"At your service, Lupin." Fama pushed Harry to his knees.

Jamie walked over and stood in front of Harry, reveling in the moment. It was almost like the image he'd seen in the Mirror of Erised; Harry kneeling before him. The only thing missing to complete the picture was Hermione Snape. "So Harry, how does it feel to be defeated?"

"Who said I'm defeated?" Harry snapped.

"I do." Jamie stood over him.

"Why?" Harry had to know. "I know you didn't want this."

"I admit, I didn't at first." Jamie crouched down so that he could look Harry in the eye. "But as Amicus taught me, it's all about power, Harry. Some of us are destined to have it; some of us, like you, just aren't."

Harry scowled at Jamie, wishing he could see his brother's expression. "You could have done so much good."

"But I prefer being bad." Jamie got back to his feet. "Now, I think it's time we moved things along."

Voldemort waited for Jamie to return to stand at his side before speaking. "Carus is right, it is time we got on with things."

"Why aren't we dead yet?" Severus asked the question that had leapt into his mind since he'd found himself restrained rather than summarily executed.

Voldemort smiled lazily. "Yet being the operative word, Snape." Voldemort reached out to the side of him "First, I have something to show you all."

Harry watched Voldemort remove an invisibility cloak to reveal a battered and chained Remus. "Dad!"

Remus couldn't respond as he was gagged.

Voldemort smiled at Harry. "Can you imagine my surprise when I found out that Remus was still alive?" Voldemort stroked a hand over Remus' head and pulled Remus' gag off.

"Get your fucking hands off me." Remus tried to pull free of Voldemort's touch.

Bella slashed Remus across the back with a silver knife making him scream out in pain. "Mind your manners, werewolf."

Harry could do little to help Remus. "Why haven't you killed him?"

Voldemort grabbed Remus by the hair and pulled his head back, before taking the knife from Bella and drawing it lightly across Remus' throat. "Surely you didn't really think I'd do something as painless as killing him did you? I truly believed your father had been a loyal servant and, shall I say, almost a friend, which means that his betrayal is far worse than your own. He will only die when I'm ready for him to die and in the meantime he'll serve the purpose for which he was meant; my executioner."

Remus could feel sweat rolling down his back as he struggled to keep still, which was difficult to do when the pain and burning sensation caused by the slow moving silver knife was almost unbearable.

Harry knew that role would bother Remus more than dying; something Voldemort seemed to be more than aware. "Don't do this to him."

"You should have both thought about the consequences when you plotted to overthrow me." Voldemort let go of Remus and started to walk towards the door, followed by Jamie and Bella. "Bring Lady Black."

Harry went to move only to find himself petrified. Voldemort stood by the door. "I could you stun all but I want you awake for this." He snapped his fingers and the rest of his men retreated behind him. "And I'd leave you frozen where you are but that wouldn't provide my pet with any sport. Finite Incantum."

Harry climbed to his feet as he was released from the spell. "I'm going to kill you before the end of today."

"Of course you are, Harry." Voldemort simply laughed. "Enjoy your life; what little you have left anyway. Luna Proficuus."

Together with Remus, the six of them who'd been unfortunate to be sucked into the room watched as Voldemort closed the door behind him before it sealed itself.

Orion looked above his head. "Harry, why is there a moon in here?"

"It's not real." Narcissa looked over at Remus. "But I'm not sure the werewolf in him knows that."

Luna blanched as she watched Remus begin to contort. "He's changing."

Harry knew that he, Severus and Narcissa had some defense against Remus but not being Animagi, Luna and Orion were both sitting ducks. "Grab hold of me."

Everyone did as Harry asked. "Dammit. I can't portkey out."

"I didn't think we would be able to." Severus told him. He called out. "Bright."

Harry scowled as no house-elf appeared. "So even house-elves can't get through. I've got one more option." He called out. "Fawkes."

Again nothing happened. "What is it with Voldemort and bloody impenetrable wards?" Harry shook his head. "We've got to get that door open."

Luna pulled out the chopsticks that were holding her hair up. "Catch."

Harry realized that Luna had thrown a wand at him. "Very creative. Where did you get these?"

"They belonged to my parents." Luna gave a small, but frightened smile as she tried to ignore the transformation taking place on the other side of the room.

Harry aimed at the false moon. "Finite Incantatum." Nothing happened. He then ran through several other spells he knew; none of which worked either.

Severus, who'd taken the other wand, tried the few spells that Harry hadn't. Narcissa frowned. "I don't know any others."

Harry glanced over to where Remus' transformation was almost complete and passed the wand he had, to Narcissa. "I'm going to transform. If Dad gets free, I might be the only thing that will be able to stop him."

"Harry, I will kill him if I have to." Severus knew he couldn't stand by and watch everyone being slaughtered.

"No." Harry was adamant. "That's exactly what I don't want to do. It's not his fault. If he gets past me, only then do what you must."

Severus didn't argue and turned his attention to the now seamless wall, a faint line being the only indication that there was a door there at all.

Suddenly Luna gave a small scream. "He's going to break free, Harry."

Harry could see the chains starting to flex as Remus tried to escape their hold. "Keep working on the door." Harry then transformed and stood in front of the group. Harry knew that Remus wouldn't attack him in his Animagus form unless Harry provoked him.

Sniffing the air, Remus growled lightly before trying to get free again. Orion watched, almost transfixed, as the chains finally gave and Remus bounded towards the group. Harry leapt in his way, and the pair became a snarling, yelping bundle of fur. Suddenly the door gave a click and swung open. Severus pushed Orion and Luna out.

Narcissa turned back to where Harry was still trying to prevent Remus from reaching them. "Harry, come on."

Suddenly Harry gave a loud and pain-filled yelp as Remus sank his teeth into Harry's front paw. Severus raised his wand to kill Remus, only for Narcissa to knock his hand down. "No." She turned her own wand on Remus. "Reducto."

Remus gave a howl of pain as a hole bored its way through his hind leg, forcing him to let go of Harry. Harry rushed out of the room before transforming. He then turned and faced the door which Severus had hurriedly closed behind them. "We can't just leave him in there."

"What do you suggest? That we simply open the door and let a werewolf run free through the Ministry?" Severus asked sardonically.

"It was just the spell that forced his change." Harry reached out to grab the door. "He might change back once he's out of that room."

Narcissa laid her hand over his. "And if he doesn't?"

"I just hate the thought of him suffering like that." Harry moved away from the door as he heard Remus smashing himself against it, trying to get out. Narcissa passed the wand she was carrying over to Orion. "You're quicker than I am; take this."

Because of his handicap, Severus handed the wand he'd been using over to Harry. "And you'd better take this."

Just as Harry took the wand, several Death Eaters ran into the room. Harry acted instantly. "Stupefy."

The first Death Eater crashed to the floor while the one behind him took aim at Harry. "Avada Ked..."

He didn't get any further as for the first time in his life, Orion unthinkingly used a killing spell on another human being. "Avada Kedavra."

The other two Death Eaters were stupefied by Harry, both dropping unconscious to the floor. Orion was shaking. "I killed someone. I didn't think. I should have just stupefied him."

Severus shook his head. "I disagree." He turned on Harry. "You should have killed them."

"I don't like killing, Severus." Harry snapped. "I'm afraid I'll slip if I do."

"You're going to have to get over your fear pretty damn quick." Severus watched as Narcissa took the wand from a tearful Orion. "Because I can't see a scenario where you aren't going to have to kill someone today."

Orion still couldn't believe what he'd done. "I didn't mean it."

Narcissa held her nephew. "We know that but right now you've got to calm down."

Orion swallowed hard and visibly pulled himself together. "Sorry. It was just a shock that I could do that."

Severus placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and looked into his face. "It isn't just Voldemort you're going to have kill, you know. You might find yourself faced with having to kill Potter. He's obviously not under the influence of the horcrux anymore, and he was willing to leave you and Orion to die at Remus' hand."

Harry felt a little panicky at the thought of having to kill Voldemort and his brother. "I honestly don't know if I can."

"But Mum said you threatened to kill Jamie, and you put him under the Cruciatus." Orion knew he wouldn't have wanted to be in Jamie's shoes when Harry had done that.

"Threatening him is one thing, Orion; even using the Cruciatus on him." Harry had found it easy to pretend; he'd even enjoyed seeing his brother squirm. "But killing him is another."

"We were afraid of this." Severus told him.

Harry frowned. "Whose we?"

"Peri, Theo and Blaise." Severus admitted. "We had a meeting a few nights ago after you'd gone to bed."

Harry suddenly felt as if his own side had turned against him. "Why?"

"Because I asked them to." After talking to Craig and Lily, Narcissa had had a feeling that Harry would go to pieces if faced with killing his brother.

"And what did you decide?" Harry couldn't help the hurt that crept into his voice.

"That we'd have to have a back-up plan." Severus told him.

Harry didn't notice the wand Narcissa had pointing at him, as he hadn't been expecting it. Luna screamed out a warning but it was too late. "Resero Transitus Ego."

There are definitely only three chapters and the epilogue left now: I've got three-quarters of the next chapter fleshed out and hope to post in a week but I'm making no promises as school is taking up most of my time at the moment.

Chapter 75: Death or Victory

Luna backed away as Harry crumpled to the floor. "You're supposed to be on his side."

"We are." Narcissa enervated Harry. "Hello again."

Luna stared at Narcissa. "What have you done?"

Narcissa could see that Luna wasn't particularly happy with them. "We were worried that Harry might not be able to kill his brother if things came down to the wire, and we can't risk everyone's lives just because Harry can't do what is necessary."

Harry got up and joined in with Narcissa to explain. "Luna, they brought me through a couple of nights ago."

Luna couldn't believe the group had gone behind Harry's back to bring his alternate to the forefront. "Why didn't Harry remember you coming through?"

"Peri, who found the spell to draw this Harry out, used the fidelius spell to hide our discussion. Our Harry just has a blurry image of the evening; almost like a forgotten dream." Narcissa explained. "If we thought that Harry could get the job done, then we wouldn't have done this."

"But you didn't even give Harry the chance to try, did you? Just because he expressed a reservation about the possibility of having to kill his brother, you simply overrode him." Luna was still angry with them. "You know he's more than capable of killing. So why do this?"

Severus didn't beat about the bush. "Because this Harry is a ruthless killer without any morals; our Harry isn't."

"Excuse me." Harry interrupted. "Standing right here."

"It's nothing you don't already know." Severus pointed out.

Harry winked at Luna. "He does have a point."

Narcissa shook her head at Harry's flirting. "Are you aware of what's happened?"

"Yes." Harry suddenly became all businesslike. "And I have an idea."

While he outlined his plan, Luna ripped a piece of material from the bottom of her robe. "Let me wrap your arm up."

Harry waited a little impatiently while Luna bandaged him up. "We've got to find the others before I can deal with Voldemort. We're going to need all the help we can get."

"They have to be in here somewhere." Severus turned round to look at the doors.

"Let's try this door first." Hoping that the doors wouldn't all suddenly start opening on them again, Harry burnt a flaming cross into the door he'd indicated, before using a spell to open it. As the door flew open sucking them inside, they came across a bloody and battered Kingsley Shacklebolt lying a few feet inside of the room.

Severus bent over him. "Kingsley?"

"Dying." Kingsley coughed up blood. His wand lay several feet away from him. "Nym in here as well. Help her."

Severus pulled off a necklace and slipped it around Kingsley's ankle; both of his arms and wrists were covered in cuts, and a bone was protruding from his left wrist. "Harry, alert Craig he's got incoming. Well, if portkeys work in this room, he's got incoming."

Harry pulled out his galleon and tapped it before shoving it back into his pocket. He then ran into the depths of the room which looked like a large stock cupboard. He had no idea why anyone would put a stock cupboard under such heavy surveillance but not having the time to worry about it, he searched the aisles until he found Nym. Checking her he found she was breathing. "She's still alive." Harry called back.

“Portkeys work here, Harry.” Severus shouted back as Kingsley disappeared from view.

Harry slipped off one of the many necklaces he was wearing and tapped it. “Portus.” He then slid it around Nym’s wrist. “Emergency Delivery.” Nym vanished and Harry made his way back to the others.

Harry pulled off the Potter family ring. “Now I know that porkeys are working...” Harry turned to Luna. “...I want you out of here.”

“No.” Luna didn’t want to leave. “Dudley’s in here somewhere.”

Not really having time to argue with her, Harry grabbed Luna’s hand and forced the ring onto her finger. “Sorry, Luna.”

Luna tugged at the ring that she couldn’t see but could feel on her finger. “It won’t come off.”

“That’s the point. I can’t stand by and let you die a second time.” Harry looked regretfully at the now furious Luna. “Heart’s...” Harry stopped. “I can’t do that.”

Luna let out a sigh of relief but it was short-lived as Harry promptly stunned her and slipped a necklace around her neck before removing the Potter family ring. “Dormio Morbus.” He then tapped the necklace. “Portus. Emergency Delivery.”

Orion was a little stunned at Harry’s way of getting Luna out of the picture. “Don’t you think that was a little harsh?”

“I really can’t have her here. If I’d sent her back to the Potter Estate, she would have simply apparated back. If she’s here, she’s a distraction.” Harry held up his hand as Orion went to say something else. “I know she isn’t my Luna but she’s still Luna, and that is enough.”

“I still think infecting her with sleeping sickness was a bit much.” Orion told him.

“As Severus has already pointed out, I really don't have any morals. I know that Craig can cure her but it won't be instantaneous, and she'll be out of action for a couple of days at least.” Harry slipped the Potter ring back onto his own finger. “Now let's see who else is here.”

Harry followed the same procedure on the next door, marking it before opening it. As soon as they were sucked inside, Harry fell to his knees as an icy cold feeling washed over him; images of Luna's body flooding his mind. Aiming the wand he had in his hand at the Dementors that surged forward after they'd sensed new prey, Harry yelled out the spell he knew would force them away from him. “Expecto Patronum.”

A large shiny stag burst forth from Harry's wand and began to buffet the Dementors as they moved hurriedly away trying to escape it. Harry let out a breath and stood up. “I hate those things.”

Orion and Narcissa, who weren't able to cast the patronus charm, had stayed well clear of the Dementors, while Severus had sent forth his own patronus, a dove, which joined Harry's stag in keeping the Dementors at bay.

As the Dementors were pushed backwards to the rear of the room, Harry came across two people lying on the floor, vacant expressions on their faces. “Avada Kedavra. Avada Kedavra.”

Orion was shocked at Harry's actions. “Couldn't we have helped them?”

“They were mindless shells, Orion.” Harry knew he seemed heartless. “I was doing them a favor.”

Everyone then turned and left the room before Harry sealed the door behind him. “Severus, if you know any spells to make sure this door isn't able to be opened, then use them. I don't anyone being sucked into that room.”

The group then worked their way through the doors sequentially until they'd located most of the missing members of their team. In some cases, they were uninjured but had been unable to leave the rooms

as the doors had sealed themselves and, not knowing as many dark spells as Severus and Narcissa, they'd been unable to free themselves. In one of the last rooms they looked in, they found a dazed and injured Andy Weasley. Hundreds of smashed globes lay on the floor of the room; Harry recognized it as the Prophecy Room. "Are you alright?"

"Arthur and my children?" Andy's first concern was for them, and not for herself.

"I'm sorry. Charlie and Tula didn't make it. I don't know where the rest of them are yet." Harry laid a hand on the woman's arm. "Now tell me, are you injured?"

Andy nodded numbly. "I've lost my wand and my back feels as if it's on fire."

Harry turned her around and winced. Andy's back was absent of clothing and a fiery mess. Harry handed over a necklace and placed it in her hand. "Emergency Delivery."

Andy hadn't been expecting to disappear so suddenly and her face registered her shock as she vanished.

Harry finally found Dudley and Draco in a room full of clocks; Isobella Porter was lying several feet away from them. Both boys were seriously injured, Dudley more so than Draco. Harry knelt down beside Dudley. "I take it you were ambushed."

Dudley couldn't nod; his head hurt too much to move. "Yes."

"Don't worry, you'll be in St. Mungo's soon." Harry told him.

"Luna?" Dudley was worried sick about her.

"St. Mungo's but she's going to be just fine." Harry didn't tell him that he was the one who'd made sure she had to go there.

Dudley tried to smile. "Good."

Harry watched as Dudley passed out. He stood up and walked over to Isobella Porter, who had some minor facial injuries as well as a broken leg, before gently lifting her and moving her so that she was sitting in between the two boys. "Hold on to their hands." Harry took another of his necklaces off, and tapped it. "Portus. This will take all three of you to St. Mungo's."

"Have you found Blaise yet?" Like everyone else, Isobella's concern was for her loved one.

"I'm sorry, we haven't." Harry placed the necklace around her neck before saying the words to send her to safety. "Emergency Delivery." Isobella, Draco and Dudley vanished.

In the penultimate room to be checked, Severus had found Nym's partner Pium but unfortunately there had been nothing he could do for him. Arthur and Fred Weasley, both of whom were still alive, were found lying a few feet away. Fred was bleeding profusely from a stomach wound and needed immediate medical attention; Severus wasn't sure that he'd make it even with it. However, he still slipped off one of his necklaces before turning it into a portkey and wrapping it around Fred's wrist. "Emergency Delivery."

While Severus had been dealing with Fred, Harry had enervated Arthur before applying a magical field dressing to his arm and pulling him to his feet. "Before you ask, Andy's been sent to St. Mungo's." Harry didn't tell him that Charlie and his wife had fallen prey to the Dementors. "Sir, there's a door here that has a flaming moon on it; no-one should go into the room beyond it. Remus is in there and he's not exactly himself. Also the blank door; we think that's the Death Chamber. We need to be able to portkey in and out of it."

Arthur understood what Harry was saying about Remus. "I can stand guard outside of the room with Remus in but I can't help with the portkey issue. I don't have access to the security on this level."

"I do." A man's voice interrupted them.

Harry span round to find Nic standing there. "What are you doing back here?"

"Peri's going to be just fine; she told me to come back." Nic had his wand drawn. "We owe Voldemort something for taking our sons from us. If you'll excuse me, I'll deal with the security issue."

Harry stopped him. "The second room to the right of us is full of Dementors. Can you seal it off for the time being? We've put spells on the door but I'd rather it didn't suddenly come undone."

Nic entered one of the farthest doors and came out a few moments later. "You can portkey in and out of any room here now except for the Death Chamber; I'm having problems overriding Voldemort's wards. At the moment I could portkey you into the room but not out of it. However, I've made sure no-one can get into the room with the Dementors in it." He'd just finished speaking when a large group of Death Eaters ran into the room.

Everyone raised their wands, the first syllables of the killing curse tripping off Harry's tongue, only for George to rip off his mask, the other seven rapidly following suit. "It's only us. The Villa Laurifer operation went off without a hitch. Hogwarts should be under a lockdown by now." Arthur moved to hug his son.

"And Villa Laurifer itself?" Harry asked.

One of the young men with George grinned. "I'd say it's probably a pile of rubble by now." Before they'd left the dungeons, Harold Barstock, a half-blood whose family had a military background and who'd been a friend of Cedric's, had left enough C4 in the dungeons to blow the house up ten times over.

Harry was glad to hear that Voldemort would have no strongholds to retreat to if he escaped. "Have you seen Theo and his group? We haven't been able to locate them here. Nor Blaise."

George shook his head. "Sorry, no."

Harry knew that time was now most definitely of the essence and he called out. "Fawkes."

Fawkes appeared on Harry's shoulder with a wand in his claw and rubbed his head over Harry's. Harry scratched the bird and took the wand away before giving it to Katie. "Glad to see you. If you can get into the Death Chamber, I want you to get Lily Black out first. Voldemort obviously wants her for a reason and I don't know what it is. Do you understand?"

Fawkes trilled almost angrily at Harry. Harry grinned at him. "Sorry, I know you're not stupid."

Orion's mouth was wide open. "Can you understand him?"

Harry nodded. "In my timeline after Dumbledore died, Fawkes bonded to me. This Fawkes isn't but I can still understand him."

Orion was interested in Fawkes. "Who is he bonded to here?"

"Your sister Cassie." Harry informed him after asking Fawkes. "If he'd been bonded to Lily then he would have been able to punch through the wards no matter what Voldemort had erected, but unfortunately he isn't."

Katie had an idea. "Couldn't we fetch Cassie, take her in with us and have Fawkes go in and get her and Lily?"

Harry frowned at her. "Do you think Lily would be very forgiving if something happened to Cassie? All it takes is for one spell to hit her as she's entering the room." Harry knew he could be an unfeeling bastard but even he wasn't ready to risk someone unnecessarily. "And as of right now we have no way of portkeying them out if things go wrong."

Katie blushed. "Sorry."

Harry turned away from her to fill George and the others in on their revised plan.

"I'll deal with the final part of the plan." George offered.

"No, you won't." Orion grabbed Harry's hand and slipped on the Black family ring. "Harry, take this."

Harry knew what Orion was going to do. "Orion, let George do this."

Narcissa agreed with Harry. "Harry's right. You've got no defense; George has."

Severus also stepped forward. "I'll do it. I'm faster and stronger than both of you."

"Either the family ring or the heir ring needs to be worn by the head of the Black household; that's me now that Sirius is dead." Orion was frightened by what he was facing but also determined. "I know we didn't plan to use the rings like this but needs must. Harry, I said before I was going to bring back honor to the Black name, and I'm going to do it, even it kills me."

Harry understood where Orion was coming from."Very well, but I'd prefer it if it didn't kill you."

Orion smiled. "I have no wish to die so you can guarantee I'll do my best to avoid doing so. When you're ready, just say the words 'Brotherly love'. I'll act as quickly as I can. Once you feel your ring vibrate, just shout out 'Death or Victory'. Now go get my Mum."

Harry and Severus took their remaining necklaces and turned them into portkeys before handing them out. "If it gets bad, then get out if you can."

Nic shook hands with Harry. "Good luck. I'll keep trying to get the wards down." Nic re-entered the room that he'd gone into earlier.

Not willing to take the chance that they'd be sucked into the Death Chamber along with Harry and the others, Orion walked out of the main room with Arthur, who was going to return with him to stand guard over Remus' temporary cage. Only once he thought Harry and

the others were safely inside the room, did Orion return to stand and wait for Harry's signal.

The Death Chamber

Standing on a dais in front of a large archway that Harry had nothing but bad memories of, Voldemort had just finished making a speech to those gathered when a large number of Death Eaters and Harry were sucked into the room. "I might have known you'd get free."

"What can I say; I hate to miss out on a party." Harry assessed the amount of Death Eaters in the room. Voldemort had obviously wanted his triumph witnessed as there were more than thirty common Death Eaters there together with all of his Lieutenants. Harry knew that their group would never be able to take them all on. He therefore let George and the others push him to stand in front of Voldemort.

George bowed low. "We found him trying various rooms, my Lord."

Voldemort gave a nasty smile as he noticed that the rest of Harry's companions were missing. "What happened to your friends, Harry?"

"I'll let you guess." Harry said sarcastically before looking around and spotting two familiar faces sitting on the stone benches surrounding the sunken stone pit; he waved at them. "Minister Fudge. I'm surprised to see you here. Madam Undersecretary; I can't say the same for you."

Neither Fudge, who looked petrified to death, nor Umbridge, who just glared smugly at Harry, bothered to respond to Harry's rejoinder.

Voldemort, however, laughed at Harry's casual attitude. "I thought it only fitting the outgoing administration witness the greatest moment in wizarding history."

Harry shook his head. "Do you know, I only thought you were deluded. Now I'm convinced you are."

George cuffed Harry around the head. "Don't be insolent, boy."

On the stone dais, Lily struggled to retain her composure as she realized what had probably happened to Orion and the others. "Harry, you bloody idiot."

"I just couldn't leave you to have all this fun alone." Harry smiled softly at her, still wondering why Voldemort wanted Lily there. His question was about to be answered.

Voldemort snapped his fingers and Lily was led to stand in front of the veil. "Aditi; Carus."

Jamie stepped over and began to roll up his sleeve. Aditi joined him and handed Voldemort a knife. Suddenly realizing what Voldemort was going to do, Harry began to struggle, getting Voldemort's attention. "A little late to protest now, Lupin."

Harry knew he had to retain Voldemort's attention, and quickly shouted out something he knew would do it. "Potter's not the Boy Who Lived." Harry heard a murmur go through the assembled Death Eaters. "Are you, Carus?" Harry was glad that neither he nor his counterpart had agreed to keep Jamie's identity a secret.

Gasps ran through the crowd at Harry's words. Voldemort addressed Jamie. "As your brother has pre-empted me, we may as well show everyone."

Jamie took off his mask. "So now everyone knows who I am and who I serve. Good. Can you imagine the wizarding world's despair as they realize that their last best hope has gone?"

Harry could see from Jamie's face he was enjoying this. As Severus had correctly pointed out to his counterpart, the horcrux hadn't affected Jamie; he'd already been corrupt. "But you're not their last best hope."

"And I suppose you are." Voldemort said sarcastically before starting to turn back towards the archway. "What a pitiful last ditch attempt to delay things."

To try and give Nic more time to bypass the wards, Harry knew that he had to somehow continue to divert Voldemort from continuing the ritual. "The Sempiterna Aevum Ritual, isn't it? Seeing as you've split your soul, for it to work you're going to..."

Voldemort held up his hand as he realized where Harry was going with the conversation. "We can finish this discussion in one moment." He then threw up a privacy bubble which encapsulated the entire dais, closing out the common Death Eaters sitting on the stone benches before turning to George and his friends. "Leave."

Harry waited for them to leave the dais before continuing. "As I was saying, you're going to have to do something to counteract the missing parts of your soul."

"Actually I don't have to." Voldemort informed Harry. "As I'm sure you're more than aware, I've already ingested some of the Boy Who Lived's blood."

"But what you don't know is that your horcruxes are gone, Voldemort. They've all been destroyed which means you now need more of the blood of the one that vanquished you. Get this ritual wrong and it will fail quite spectacularly." Harry knew that unfortunately it wouldn't kill Voldemort as he'd be protected by the bubble the spell would encapsulate him in but the backlash from the failed spell would kill Harry and everyone else in the room.

Jamie's hand flew to his chin. "I'm afraid you may have overlooked a horcrux, Lupin."

Harry merely smirked. "Throw the chain to your master, Potter."

Voldemort held out his hand and Jamie handed over the necklace. Voldemort scowled. "How?"

"That would be telling." Harry enjoyed the discomfiture on Jamie's face. "Needless to say, he didn't put up much of a fight."

Hiding his anger, Voldemort shrugged; he'd punish Jamie later. "It doesn't really matter now does it? Once the ritual is complete I will no

longer need a horcrux to make me immortal." He turned to Jamie. "Let's finish this."

Harry yawned and slowly stretched, giving the appearance of someone without a care in the world. "Be my guest; use Potter and see what happens. I can tell you now, it won't work because he's not the Boy Who Lived; I am."

Voldemort hesitated; Harry was almost too confident. "Prove it."

Staring Voldemort in the eye, Harry hissed. "It's strange how I speak parseltongue and Potter doesn't. It's not as if it runs in the family."

Voldemort turned to Jamie who was scowling at Harry. "Did you understand what he said?"

"Of course." Jamie hissed back as his scowl turned into a lazy smile.

Having all of his alternate's memories, it was Harry's turn to be stunned. "You could have gotten into the Chamber on your own."

"I didn't realize that until after you'd opened it." Jamie admitted. "It was quite a shock to discover that I could understand what you were saying."

"So what about the snakes on the dueling platform?" Harry couldn't believe that Jamie hadn't known he was a parselmouth then.

"I thought I'd imagined them saying something. If you remember I was poisoned; I just thought I was hallucinating." Jamie shrugged. "And after seeing how Snape was treated, I was hardly going to tell anyone what I'd discovered after listening to you open the Chamber, now was I?"

Harry was still finding it hard to believe that Jamie was a parselmouth. "And the snake you encountered in the Tournament?"

"It wouldn't back off when I asked it to, so I fired a spell at it." Jamie was enjoying the shocked look on Harry's face. "Unfortunately I missed and one of its heads bit me. Then you turned up."

Voldemort had had enough of listening to them. "You two can swap stories after I finish the ritual."

After Jamie's revelation had destroyed his contention that Harry was the true Boy Who Lived, Harry knew he'd have to reveal who he was if he wanted to stop Voldemort from continuing with the ceremony. "Have you told Voldemort who I really am?"

"What do you mean?" Jamie didn't know what Harry was intimating.

"I'm the other Harry." Harry waited for Jamie to catch on.

"You can't be." Jamie told him.

"But I am." Harry could see Jamie was trying to work out if Harry was playing with him.

Voldemort scowled at the pair. "Will one of you please tell me what the hell is going on?"

Harry grinned at Voldemort. "He can't. He's under oath. But I can tell you that I'm not the Harry you know."

Voldemort sighed, and rubbed his forehead. "Go ahead. Tell me whatever it is you're obviously dying to."

"I'm almost like two people in one body. I travelled back from the future but something went wrong with my spell. In my timeline, you'd taken over and we were out of options; hence the spell. I should have melded with the Harry you know but I didn't." Harry hurriedly explained. "Which means I can think and act independently of the Harry you know, albeit I have to use his body to do it."

"You don't really expect me to believe you, do you?" Voldemort asked him, after listening to Harry's account.

"I bear two heir marks. As you know, I can be heir to more than one fortune but should only bear the heir mark of the highest ranking

noble I'm inheriting from. As you can see, I have two." Harry showed Voldemort both of his heir marks.

Voldemort knew that what Harry was showing him was supposed to be impossible. "One is obviously the Potter heir mark. And the other?"

"It's the Snape family heir mark; in my timeline Severus Snape adopted me before making me his heir." Harry filled him in. "And the Snapes rank below the Potter family."

"You could have falsified it." Voldemort was now a little hesitant to continue with the ritual until he'd made sure whether Harry was telling the truth or not.

"There's something else. In my timeline, being the Boy Who Lived, whenever I got close to my Voldemort, I felt immense pain. The same pain as I'm feeling now." Harry told him. "Something Potter over there doesn't seem to suffer from."

Voldemort found it hard to believe that Harry was suffering at all. "You don't look as if you're in pain."

"Believe me, I am; I'm just good at hiding it." Harry knew that what he was going to ask Voldemort to do next, to prove what he was saying, was going to hurt like hell. "Touch my forehead where Potter's scar is."

Intrigued, Voldemort did as Harry asked, pressing his finger into the clear skin of Harry's forehead.

Harry fell screaming to his knees as pain almost as bad as the Cruciatus lanced through him. Voldemort was taken aback to see a lightning bolt scar forming in blood under his finger. "You're telling the truth, aren't you?"

Harry struggled to answer as Voldemort hadn't removed his finger. "Yes."

Voldemort stepped away from Harry who was pale and shaking. "This presents me with something of a dilemma."

"You don't know whose blood to use, do you?" Harry climbed back to his feet.

Voldemort didn't. "I'll just use both."

"I've got a proposition." Harry seized on the opening he saw emerging. "I'd like to offer you a duel. If you win, you get my blood."

Voldemort knew that he could just refuse Harry and simply kill him. "I could just kill you now and save myself the trouble. I can just take your blood."

"And everyone in this bubble will know you're a coward." Harry knew that would piss Voldemort off.

"My Lord." Malfoy interrupted. "We all know you're nothing of the sort, and we have no idea of what this other Harry, if it's true what he's saying, is capable of."

Voldemort span angrily on Lucius. "I was going to refuse him but it looks as if I have something to prove; that I'm not afraid of anyone or anything."

"Except death." Harry couldn't resist the dig. "Accept my offer of the duel and if I lose, I'll freely offer you my blood. You know very well that the blood's more potent that way."

Voldemort thought about it for a moment. "And what do you want in return?"

Harry knew that as it wasn't a pureblood duel anyone could interfere, and he didn't want Voldemort receiving additional help. "I want your word no-one will try and interfere in our fight, and if I win, Lily Black goes free. So are you agreeable to my terms?"

"Your terms are accepted. The duel will be no-holds barred but neither of us will be able to use the killing curse." Voldemort didn't want to take the chance of dying with his final horcrux having been destroyed. "The loser is the first to yield."

"Agreed." Harry had little choice but to accept Voldemort's unwelcome proviso about not using the killing curse.

Voldemort then dropped the privacy bubble before turning to the crowd. "I've agreed on a little demonstration for you all. No-one is to interfere or I will make your family suffer for your interference while you watch. Do I make myself my clear?" Hurried assurances spilt forth from the mouths of the crowd.

Harry held out a hand. "I need a wand."

"Give him a wand, Jamie." Voldemort ordered; he was still furious with Jamie for losing the horcrux.

Jamie reluctantly handed over one of his wands, and Harry winked cheekily at him. "I'll try not to break it; then again I'm not promising anything."

Jamie could do little as Voldemort walked down the steps and Harry followed him. The crowd moved up the stone benches to the very edges of the room. Harry held up the wand. "My terms are that if I win you let Lily Black leave unharmed, and if I lose I will freely offer you my blood."

"Agreed." Voldemort then touched his wand to Harry's before moving to the first level step of the benches. Harry bowed and Voldemort did the same.

Harry immediately sprang into action and sent a Reducto curse at Voldemort's arm which missed as Voldemort side-stepped it while sending the same curse at Harry's legs.

Harry jumped into the air and returned fire with a freezing curse which Voldemort dispersed with a spectacular display of pyrotechnics. Harry threw up a reflective shield and watched as Voldemort did the same. The flames harmlessly rebounded off Harry's shield, some of them heading towards the crowd and others back towards Voldemort.

Harry then used the same spell the other Harry had used on Dumbledore just as Voldemort lowered his shield. "Lente Mille Vengradis Sectum."

Voldemort merely grimaced as small cuts began to make themselves known over his body. "Reparo Iniuria."

Harry watched as the small cuts dissipated. "Nebulosus."

Voldemort used a heat spell to cut his way through the fog that Harry had instigated, and sent a spell towards him. "Toxicum Talum Milia."

Harry defended with a shield and watched as the tiny darts dropped to the floor. "Steal that from Amicus, did you?"

Voldemort snorted. "No. He stole it from me. Saxum. Silex."

As a salvo of large stones headed towards him, Harry managed to stop them with his rapidly weakening shield. Having already been depleted by the stones and the darts, Voldemort's second spell overloaded the shield, and the hail of small rocks flew through it towards Harry. Harry swore as hundreds of tiny razorblade sharp stones cut into his skin. "Screw this."

Harry let rip with a barrage of pain spells, hoping that one of them would reach Voldemort, who didn't even seem to be breaking a sweat. He finished his attack with the Cruciatus curse.

Voldemort smirked as he easily defended against all of the spells Harry had sent his way. "My turn."

Harry was hard pressed to hold out against the volley that Voldemort began to fire off. By now he had come to the realization that this Voldemort was a lot more powerful than his own Voldemort had been. He'd expected to be facing someone slightly more powerful than this timeline's Dumbledore, and not someone of the magnitude Voldemort actually was. As Voldemort took a breath, Harry knew that he had to hit him with something he didn't expect. "Sectumsempra."

Watching with the other Death Eaters, Severus knew that, unless Lily or Remus had told Harry about the spell, his counterpart must have also come up with the spell as he had never told Harry about its existence.

Voldemort was taken unawares by the spell, blood blooming from the cut which now ran from his neck to his waist. "Stringo Fluo."

Severus hadn't been aware of a countermeasure for the spell but Voldemort had certainly managed to stop the flow of blood from the slash. Severus continued to watch as Harry managed to follow through with a Reducto curse which hit Voldemort's other shoulder, before invoking a spell Hermione had invented. "Pestifer Locusta Augustus."

Voldemort didn't bother moving as a large cloud of Locust spread out before coming together in a single column and headed towards him. Raising his wand, Voldemort sent forth a small whirlwind to crush them out of existence. "Turbo Contero."

Harry was almost knocked off his feet as the whirlwind flew by him. He then hurriedly erected a shield as he heard Voldemort use the spell which he knew would sever his wand hand if it hit him. Not wanting to give Harry time to recover, Voldemort starting sending powerful blasting spells at Harry's shield.

Harry knew that his shield wasn't going to hold up much longer under the continued bombardment. As his shield collapsed, Voldemort took advantage of it and delivered a spell Harry had never come across before. "Corium Abeo Renevo."

Harry almost dropped his wand in shock as his skin began to turn to dust before beginning to regrow itself. He was horrified to find that the spell was cyclic and he crashed to his knees; the pain was unlike anything he had ever known. Trying to keep his head, he sent a blasting curse at Voldemort but, unable to concentrate on anything except for the intense sensations affecting his entire body, Harry missed, hitting one of the watching Death Eaters instead.

Voldemort used one final spell on Harry. "Obscurum Visum."

As well as being in agonizing pain and unable to concentrate, Harry was now also effectively blinded, and Voldemort casually walked up to him before placing his wand to Harry's bleeding head. "Do you yield, Harry?"

Knowing he'd lost and just wanting the pain to end, Harry gasped out his words. "I yield."

Voldemort ended the spells he'd inflicted on Harry, and Harry climbed shakily to his feet. As the pair walked back to the dais, Voldemort put up a small privacy bubble around himself and Harry. "You fought well, Harry. Agree to serve me, and I'll let you live."

"If I agree, will you let Lily go?" Harry asked quietly.

"No." Voldemort refused. "I need Lady Black for the ritual. She's linked to both myself and Jamie through his blood."

Harry shook his head. "In that case, your price is too high for me."

"A pity." Voldemort dropped the bubble.

Jamie gloated at Harry as Harry went to pass him back his wand. "You're not exactly a good dueler, are you?"

At Jamie's words, Harry hesitated before snapping the wand over his knee. "Whoops. And you're not exactly a good brother, are you?"

Jamie angrily threw the pieces of the wand, that Harry had slapped into his hand, onto the floor. "As I know you're actually not my brother right now, I don't really need to be."

"And if it had been your Harry, what then?" Harry asked.

"He's made his choice." Jamie answered.

Harry knew that it was time to set the final part of their revised plan into operation. He couldn't wait any longer for Nic to override Voldemort's wards. "Well, so much for brotherly love."

"What can I say? Harry chose the wrong side." Jamie turned away from Harry to stand by Voldemort.

Harry held still as his sleeve was rolled up by Bella. "I hope you've sterilized that knife."

"Funny." Bella looked at the torn sleeve above the bandage on Harry's other arm. "Have a little run in with the werewolf, did we?"

"No, I bit myself." Harry couldn't stop himself from being sarcastic.

Voldemort laughed. It was almost a shame he had to kill Harry; he had a cutting edge the other Harry lacked. "You're very witty."

"Why thank you." Harry winced as Bella drew the knife down his arm; the resulting blood dripping into a vial that Aditi was holding. "I do try."

Jamie held out his own arm for Bella. "I don't know why but I expected more of a performance from you."

Harry laughed mockingly. "I'm sorry you missed my last one."

Jamie frowned as Aditi caught his blood as well. "What are you going on about?"

"Amicus. I'm sure you know that Harry challenged him to a duel. What you don't know is that it was me who brought him to his knees. I had him crying like a baby and begging for mercy." Harry knew that Jamie wouldn't remember the other Harry telling him about Sirius. "I admit I didn't end it, but by the time Luna and your Harry had finished with him, what was left would only have been useful if it snowed or as kitty litter."

"You bastard." Jamie pulled his arm away from Aditi and punched Harry in the face.

Harry simply smirked and wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth. "You hit like a girl, Potter."

“Enough.” Voldemort turned to Bella. “Bring me the Hallows.”

Harry watched as Bella passed a second knife that appeared to be made of ebony to Aditi, and picked up the three Hallows. Bella then placed the cloak on the floor, and Lily was forced to stand upon it before being held in place by a spell. Voldemort placed the ring on his finger, and brandished the Elder wand before casting a spell on the vial that contained both Harry’s and Jamie’s blood. Harry shuddered in disgust as Voldemort then swallowed the liquid.

Jamie waited for Bella to roll up his mother’s sleeve and was surprised when she opened Lily’s blouse instead. “What are you doing?” Jamie hissed at the woman.

“She’s preparing my sacrifice, of course.” Voldemort turned to look at Jamie. “Amicus explained that sacrifices are important; this is probably the most important one ever. Your mother will go down in history.”

Harry couldn’t believe that Jamie had thought that Voldemort would spare Lily. “Perhaps you’d like to offer to take her place, Potter.”

Jamie wanted to but couldn’t speak the words. Harry sighed, and addressed Voldemort. “I’ll take her place.”

“So noble.” Voldemort knew his next words would infuriate Harry. “But I don’t think so. I have other plans for you.” Voldemort fully intended to rip this alternate Harry’s memories from his mind. He wanted to know what the alternate timeline had held.

Wanting to stop what was about to happen to his mother, but too afraid to cross Voldemort, Jamie stood pale faced as he watched Aditi hold out the sacrificial knife that she’d taken from Bella so that Voldemort could take it.

Lily struggled futilely as Voldemort turned to face Harry. “Any last words for Lady Black, Harry?”

Harry had been about to physically attack Voldemort, when he felt his ring vibrate. “Just three. Death or Victory.”

Everyone shot to their feet as a werewolf and Orion Black suddenly appeared on the dais. Frightened by the sensation of portkeying, Remus lashed out, sending Orion flying through the air and into Voldemort and Bella, knocking them both away from Lily and off the dais. Harry turned and smirked at Jamie. "You wanted a performance. I think it's just begun."

Suddenly the door at the back of the room burst open and Aurors led by Rufus Scrimgeour and Nic piled into the room. George and the others removed their masks and turned on the surprised Death Eaters who hadn't expected an attack from their own kind. Harry grinned. "We did warn Voldemort there would be a rearguard."

Lucius and the others jumped down off the dais and began to join in the fighting. On the dais, still holding the knife, Aditi darted forward, plunging it into Lily's chest as Jamie screamed out. "No."

Harry turned to Aditi as he saw the werewolf's head snap up at Jamie's scream. "I hope you know what you've just done."

"I know exactly what I've just done." Aditi crowed triumphantly as Lily's head fell forward; the spell holding her in place. "I've given my Master eternal life."

"Mum." Jamie ran towards Lily only for Fawkes to appear in front of him; both the phoenix and Lily disappearing in a flash of flames.

Aditi turned on Harry; the knife held out in front of her. "She was supposed to go through the veil. Now I suppose you'll have to take her place as you so generously offered to do."

"I don't think so." Jamie aimed his wand at the girl. "Avada Kedavra."

Harry was surprised. "Why save me?"

"That wasn't for you; that was for my mother." Jamie turned his wand on Harry. "This is for you."

Harry dropped and rolled, narrowly escaping Jamie's killing curse. As he did so, he wondered why Voldemort hadn't gotten back up and attacked him yet. Harry found out why as he spotted Voldemort being knocked over by a growling Remus. Deprived of his rightful prey by Jamie, Remus had instead attacked Voldemort, who had indeed gotten back up to join in the fight.

After climbing to her feet, Bella took out one of the rogue Death Eaters with a killing curse; a malicious smile crossing her face as she recognized the blond woman who had been standing next to him. "Cissie."

Narcissa span round. "Bella. I hoped you'd end up rotting in Azkaban like you deserved."

"Well it just goes to show that you don't always get what you want." Bella sent a reducto curse at Narcissa's head.

Narcissa ducked. "Bitch."

"Takes one to know one." Bella sent her favorite spell next; the conjunctivitis curse. "Don't look now."

Narcissa stumbled as a Death Eater careened into her, sending her flying out of the way of the curse but forcing her to drop her wand.

Bella stood over her. "That was short and sweet. Now tell me, Cissie, how would you like to die?"

As Narcissa was battling her sister, Harry was doing his best to fight unarmed as he rolled out of the way of Jamie's Reducto spell.

Finally, Katie reached him and threw his wand to him. "Thanks." He then turned to Jamie. "That's better. We're on an equal footing now, Potter."

Jamie stood his ground. "You're going down, Lupin."

"Probably, but you're going down with me, Potter." To his right, Harry could see Remus fighting with something that looked remarkably like

a hell-hound. Harry assumed this was Voldemort's Animagus form; for some reason he'd expected a snake. Knowing he wouldn't get a better shot at taking Voldemort out than this, Harry surprised Jamie by turning his wand on himself, and using a spell his Hermione had created. "Accelerio Obnoxius Harry Potter."

Jamie sent his second killing curse at Harry who, under the influence of the spell he'd just used on himself, became little more than a blur as he dodged out of the way. Just as he did so, Voldemort managed to dislodge Remus off him, and sent the werewolf flying into the crowd of fighting Death Eaters towards where Narcissa and Bella were engaged.

Hitting the floor, Remus was about to turn and attack Voldemort again when the wolf in him detected a scent it recognized. It was the scent of the woman who'd spent hours torturing Remus. Just as Bella finished asking Narcissa how she wanted to die, Remus leapt into the air.

Narcissa, who'd been about to activate her portkey, was delighted to see Bella disappearing under a pile of angry, howling fur. She picked up her wand before getting to her feet and answering Bella's question. "It certainly wouldn't have been like that." Glancing over at the dais she was just in time to see Voldemort transform and send a killing curse hurtling towards Harry.

Almost transfixed, Narcissa ignored the fighting that was going on around her, as she watched Harry grab Jamie, twisting him so that he was now in the path of the killing curse and not Harry. Just before the curse hit Jamie, Harry moved to the side. Jamie could do nothing to avoid the curse, and the power behind it sent him soaring through the air and onto the lower level of the stone steps, before falling lifelessly to the ground below.

Voldemort sent a second killing curse towards Harry, which this time Harry simply dodged as he continued forward on a collision course. Voldemort was unable to fire off a third curse as Harry had by now impacted him, sending them both flying towards archway and through the veil. Just before the pair entered the threshold of the archway,

Harry grinned at Voldemort's terrified face, and spoke the words that he now knew were true. "I am the Boy Who Lived."

Penultimate Chapter: We return to 2010.

Chapter 76: 2010

Sorry, this is a really, really, long chapter!

12th March 2010

Auri ignored the paper she'd thrown on the floor and got out of bed. One hour later found her knocking on the door of Room 7C. When its occupant called out 'come in', she pushed open the door.

"Good morning." Auri made her way to the table and chairs set in the corner of the room. "Would you like to come and sit down?"

Dae made his way across to the chairs and sat down. "Are you going to tell me what's going on now? I'm not used to seeing a healer burst into tears before fleeing. If it's bad just spit it out."

Auri felt a little guilty about running out the previous night but she hadn't been able to face Dae. "There's nothing wrong with you now."

"Now?" Dae wondered what could have been so wrong with him that would illicit such a response from his healer.

"Mr. Venant, you..." Auri was cut off.

"Please call me Dae, Healer..." Dae looked at Auri's name tag. "Lupin? Are you related to Remus Lupin by any chance?"

Auri nodded. "Yes."

Despite his worries about his health, Dae winked at Auri. "Remus didn't tell me he had such a pretty relative."

Auri closed her eyes for an instant. "Mr. Venant..."

At Auri's continued formality, Dae interrupted her for a second time. "Please don't get the wrong impression; I'm not hitting on you. I was engaged before I came in here, so you've got no worries on that score."

“Was engaged?” Auri wondered if Dae could remember anything from the time he had been staying in the hospital.

“My fiancée betrayed me.” Dae’s face fell as he thought of the last time he’d seen Anna. “In the worst possible way.”

Auri knew differently. “Mr. Venant...” At Dae’s face pulling, Auri dropped the formality. “Dae, what’s the last thing you remember?”

“Being tortured.” Dae rubbed his arms as he remembered Bella taunting him before she’d put him under the Cruciatus yet again.

Auri softened her look and placed a hand on Dae’s arm. “Dae, Bellatrix Lestrange tortured you to the point of insanity.”

Dae patted Auri on the back of her hand. “But you’ve managed to cure me, haven’t you? So no harm done.”

Auri was hard pushed to hold back her tears. “Dae, there’s no easy way to say this but that was twelve years ago.”

Dae shook his head. “That can’t be.”

“I’m so very sorry.” Auri kept her hand on Dae’s arm. “Dae, Remus is my Dad.”

Dae’s face went from shocked to amused. “Tell Remus it was a nice try. The gag might have worked if you’d said you were anyone but one of his daughters.”

“Dae, I’m Aurilia.” Auri could see that Dae didn’t believe her.

“And I’m the Dark Lord.” Dae had had enough of the joke. “Now please find me my clothes and wand so that I can leave.”

“Excuse me for a moment.” Auri got up and left the room.

Dae sat at the table, impatiently tapping on it with his fingers. When the door opened again he found his parents standing there. “Have you come to collect me?”

“Dae.” Peri burst into tears and ran across the room, pulling Dae up from the chair and into her embrace. “My baby.”

Looking down at his mother crying in his arms, Dae was suddenly hit with the terrible realization that his healer had indeed been telling the truth. Meeting his Dad’s eyes, he saw both relief and pity mingled in his gaze. “Oh Merlin. Aurilia really is who she said she is, isn’t she?”

Nic nodded. “I’m sorry, Dae.”

Dae suddenly found his legs wouldn’t support him anymore, and he dropped back into the chair he’d been sitting in. “It’s really been twelve years?”

Peri wiped her eyes and placed a loving hand on her son’s face. “It has. We kept hoping Auri would find a cure sooner.”

“Auri cured me?” Dae couldn’t reconcile the pretty healer with the picture he had in his mind of the young girl Auri had been when he last saw her.

“She took accelerated courses in both Muggle and wizarding healing. She’s a specialist in brain disorders.” Peri had nothing but love and respect for the young woman who had done everything she could to help cure her son. “She refused to give in when everyone else said that nothing more could be done.”

Dae dropped his face into his hands. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

Peri passed him anti-nausea potion. “Drink this.”

Dae swiftly swallowed the potion, feeling his stomach settle down. “Thanks. You wouldn’t have a calming potion there as well, would you?”

“I do.” Peri passed that over as well. Anticipating Dae’s likely reaction to the news, Auri had given Peri a small artillery of potions.

Dae felt calm permeate his entire body. "I think I can now actually function without wanting to run screaming from the room."

"Auri said that you're going to have to go through a period of adjustment." Peri could see that, as they'd expected, Dae was having trouble getting to grips with the reality of what he'd been told. "But we're going to be here for you."

Dae squeezed his mother's hand. His mind was racing as he thought about everything that could have possibly happened in twelve years. Dae was then hit by the realization that his daughter wouldn't be a baby anymore. "Chloe?"

Peri's face softened as she thought about her beautiful granddaughter. "She's attending Hogwarts now."

Dae wanted to know what she looked like. "Do you have a photo?"

Peri pulled one out of her bag. "She looks like you would without your disguise." As no-one had been able to remove the ring that Dae wore except for him, his disguise had remained in place over the twelve years, aging with him.

Dae didn't know how he felt as he looked at the picture of the pretty dark-haired girl sitting in the quidditch stands. "She's beautiful."

"We think so." Peri wished that all the others thing he needed to know were as pleasant as finding out about his daughter. "As you can see, she's a Gryffindor."

"Does she like it at Hogwarts?" Dae didn't care what house his daughter was in; he just needed to know that his daughter was happy.

"She loves it." Peri caught Nic's eye and he nodded. "She actually lives at the school full-time."

Dae frowned. "Why didn't you take her in?"

"She lives with Anna, Dae." Peri knew what Sirius had told Dae. "Anna wasn't Voldemort's daughter; Sirius lied to you."

Dae was stunned. "She didn't betray me?"

Nic shook his head. "She didn't."

"But I saw her..." Dae's voice trailed off as he remembered how hurt he'd felt when he'd seen her casually playing chess with Voldemort.

"She had no choice except to do as she was told. Voldemort had your daughter as collateral." Nic could see Dae was horrified with himself over what he'd thought.

"Oh Merlin." Dae was disgusted with himself. "I should have trusted her."

"Anna never blamed you, Dae." Peri hurried to comfort Dae. "She brings Chloe to see you at least once a month."

"So Chloe knows all about me?" Dae wasn't sure he was happy about his daughter having witnessed him in the depths of insanity.

"She's known about you ever since she was old enough to understand." Nic sat down. "There's more but it's not for us to tell you."

Dae was about to ask another question when he belatedly became conscious that his brother wasn't there. "Where's Leo?"

"Leo's been gone for twelve years, Dae." Peri felt her heart contract at the thought of her other son. "Voldemort killed him after Leo gave him the Elder wand."

"Leo would never do that." Dae knew that Leo would have died first.

"He did it for us." Peri bit back a sob.

Dae couldn't believe his brother was really gone. "Why didn't Voldemort kill me?"

"We don't know." Even though Nic had arrived on the scene just after Harry had discovered his son's body, he'd found out more about what had happened from an Auror who'd seen Leo fall. "I found Peri injured in her office. An Auror saw Voldemort kill Leo before he turned and walked away, leaving you standing where you were. Before the Auror could reach you, he was attacked himself. By the time he'd dealt with the man, you were gone. French found you wandering around alone."

Dae knew that if it hadn't been for the calming potion, he wouldn't have been able to deal with the news about Leo's death in such a composed manner. "Who else?"

"There's someone waiting to see you outside." Peri hugged Dae. "They'll tell you more."

Dae wondered if it was Anna. "Aren't you going to stay?"

Nic shook his head. "It wouldn't be fair."

Dae was now really confused. "But..."

"We'll be waiting in Auri's office." Peri kissed her son on his cheek and followed Nic out of the room. Once outside and away from the room, she turned to her husband. "I'm so frightened of what he's going to do when he finds out; what if it sends him back inside himself?"

Nic took Peri into his arms. "Don't worry. Auri said that won't happen." He just hoped Auri was right, as the work she'd done on Dae was virgin territory in the wizarding world.

Dae was standing nervously by the window when a tentative knock sounded at the door. Spinning round he found Remus standing in the doorway, and relief flooded through him. He hadn't known who or what to expect. "Remus!"

Remus felt guilty as Dae marched across the room and pulled him into brief hug. "Hello, Dae."

"That's all I get after twelve years?" Dae could sense something wasn't right. "You've got bad news, haven't you?"

Remus didn't really want to tell Dae after he'd only just found about Leo, but Auri had insisted that the worst of the news be delivered all at once so that Dae would have time to process it. "I'm sorry but I have."

"Tell me." Dae demanded, his heart pounding.

"It's about Anna." Remus swallowed hard.

Dae guessed immediately what it was. "She's with someone else isn't she?"

"I'm really sorry." Remus almost couldn't bear to look at his friend. "She is."

"I shouldn't be surprised. I couldn't expect her to wait around for twelve years for me." Even as Dae spoke the words, he knew that that was exactly what he had expected. He looked contemplatively at Remus. "Why did you get to be the bearer of bad news?"

"Because I'm the one she's with." Remus watched Dae's face turned ugly and he braced himself for what he knew was coming.

Dae couldn't believe what he was hearing. "You bastard. You knew how I felt about her."

Remus didn't make any excuses. "I did."

At Remus' admission, Dae lashed out, punching Remus as hard as he could in the face. "Get the fuck away from me."

Remus, who hadn't even staggered at the blow, left the room. Marching up the hallway, he found Auri waiting with Peri and Nic. Peri gasped at the red mark that adorned Remus' face. "Let me heal that."

Remus shook his head. "I deserved it; it will stay where it is."

Auri stood up. "If you'll excuse me, I need to see to my patient."

Peri hoped that Dae wouldn't take it out on Auri.

Auri didn't bother knocking and pushed open the door to find the chair and tables upended. "Dae?"

"You can fuck off with your bloody father." Dae snarled at her. "You knew and you didn't tell me."

Knowing that Dae wasn't as angry as he could have been because of the calming potion, and believing that he wouldn't hurt her, Auri simply stood her ground. "Because it wasn't my place to do so."

"I expect you had a good laugh about it." Dae knew that wasn't true but he needed to lash out and couldn't do it physically with Auri.

"Not at all." Auri closed the door behind her. "When Dad first told me, I was angry on your behalf at both him and Anna."

Dae scowled at Auri. "Bully for you. You've done your bit for your poor insane experiment. Now get out."

"No." Auri walked over to where Dae was standing in the corner. She knew that he didn't know how much he looked like a cornered animal. She held out her hand. "Come sit down with me." Dae looked disdainfully at her hand. Auri continued to hold it out. "Please?"

Dae reluctantly took her hand and let Auri lead him to sit down on his bed. "Why? Wasn't Lily enough for him?"

"Aunt Lily's dead, Dae." Auri took the chair opposite him. "One of Voldemort's Death Eaters tried to complete the ritual to make him immortal; she stabbed Aunt Lily, killing her instantly."

Dae thought about the vivacious red-head, who he'd liked immensely, and felt sorrow at the thought that she, like Leo, was gone. "I'm sorry to hear that. Lily was a lovely woman."

"She was." Auri knew that her aunt would always be missed.

“What about her children?” Dae knew that his nieces and nephew would have been orphans.

“Dad and Anna took them in.” Auri had also moved in with her Dad after he was released from Azkaban as Nia had been opposed to her pushing herself so hard, and had tried to put a stop to it.

Dae wasn’t surprised to learn that Remus had opened his door to the children. “Why didn’t Narcy take them in?”

Auri was just telling Dae about Lily’s will when the door opened and Anna stood in the doorway. “Auri, can I please speak to Dae alone?”

Auri looked at Dae who nodded. “Come in.”

Anna stepped aside as Auri passed her and closed the door on her way out. “Hello, Dae.”

“Anna.” Even after finding out about her and Remus, Dae still had to stop himself from rushing across the room and taking her in his arms.

“I shouldn’t have let Remus tell you.” Anna walked towards the bed. “I should have done it.”

“It hardly matters who told me.” Dae couldn’t take his eyes off her face. “The fact still remains that you’re with someone else.”

“I didn’t plan on it.” Anna looked at the chair. “May I?”

“Go ahead.” Dae was struck by the surrealism of the moment; his brain was telling him she was someone else’s but his heart felt as if she still belonged to him.

Anna sat down. “I never meant to hurt you like this.”

“But you have.” Dae knew that to Anna their relationship was a long time over. “Why?”

"Because I wasn't strong enough to keep coming here and finding you'd never improved." Anna looked down at her hands.

"Auri didn't give up hope though, did she?" Dae couldn't believe that Anna, who'd professed that she'd always love him, had given up on him whereas his friend's daughter had strived to find a cure for him.

"No, she didn't." Anna knew that Auri had felt guilty about what had happened to Dae. "She blamed herself for what happened to you."

Dae was shocked. "But it wasn't her fault."

"We know that." Anna told him. "But Auri refused to believe us. She gave up so much for you."

"Unlike you." Dae couldn't help the vitriol that crept into his voice.

"Unlike me." Anna admitted. "I'm sorry."

"No, you're not." Dae didn't believe her. "You're settled in a happy relationship aren't you?"

"I am." Anna knew that she was hurting Dae with every word she spoke.

Dae ran a hand over his face. "How long did you wait before sleeping with Remus?"

"Dae, it wasn't like that." Anna had known that this would be difficult.

"Then how was it, Anna?" Dae snapped.

"Isn't it enough that you know I'm with Remus?" Anna didn't want to tell Dae about how she and Remus had gotten together. "You don't need to hear the gory details."

"Tell me." Dae knew he was being masochistic, but he had to know. He could see that Anna was reluctant. "You owe me an explanation."

Anna sighed and began to tell him.

December 29th 1999

Remus picked up the little girl and swung her around. "Are you being a good girl for Mummy?"

Chloe gave him a goofy grin. "Me good girl, Dada."

Remus kissed her cheek and put her into her playpen. "Now you play with your teddies. Daddy's going to take Mummy a glass of orange juice up."

"Me juice?" Chloe looked up hopefully at her Dad.

"When I come back." Remus turned to Pasha. "Can you watch her?"

Pasha bowed. "I take good care of Chloe, Master Remus."

"I know you do." Remus headed into the kitchen and poured out a glass of orange juice and took it up to Anna's room.

Anna sneezed as Remus came in. "How did I manage to get Muggle flu in the middle of the holidays? I should have at least had the decency to get it during term time."

"I've no idea. Just lucky I guess." Remus passed her the orange juice before sitting at the side of the bed. "Chloe's missing you."

"And I miss her but I don't want her exposed to this." Anna sighed as she thought of her daughter. "Have you been to see Dae?"

"I took Chloe with me." Remus knew that the little girl had no idea what was going on. "But Healer Grant said that there's been no change."

"I was really hoping that there might have been some improvement." Anna couldn't hide her disappointment.

Remus patted her hand. "Don't give up hope."

Anna wiped away the stray tears that had trickled down her cheeks, and smiled waterily at Remus. "I'm surprised you haven't kicked me out yet."

"Because as I keep telling you, I need someone to do my laundry." Remus teased, before turning serious. "You're welcome to stay here as long as you want to. I'm never going to remarry and I love having Chloe around. I know she's not mine, but I love her as much as I love my own children."

"I have to admit hearing her call you Dada that first time was a bit of a shock." For Anna the moment had been bittersweet.

"She was only copying the other children." Remus had been secretly thrilled at the time but he hadn't want to upset Anna by telling her that. "As soon as she understands, we'll tell her about Dae."

"Remus, you're such a good friend." Anna squeezed his hand. "There aren't many men who'd have let me and Chloe stay like this."

Remus stood up. "Dae would have done the same thing for me if our positions were reversed."

Anna watched Remus leave and she lay back against her pillows. She'd moved into Grimmauld Square to help look after the children while Remus had been in Azkaban, and she'd ended up staying. After learning about Lily's death, Remus had been barely functioning, and his injuries the first full moon afterwards had been some of the worst she'd ever seen. She'd known then that she couldn't leave him alone with the children; more than that, she'd been afraid of losing her friend. In the end it had been Chloe who'd helped to drag Remus out of the depression he'd fallen into.

October 2nd 1998 - Hogwarts

Remus sat on the sofa in Anna's office watching Chloe crawl around; his mind mainly focused on Lily and what should have been between the two of them. Georgie walked in. "Do you want come down and join us for lunch?"

Remus shook his head. "I'm not hungry."

"Dad, you've got to eat." Georgie was worried sick by her Dad's behavior; Remus was still barely touching his food and didn't want to do anything that didn't involve a bottle of scotch.

"I said I'm not hungry." Remus snapped, his temper shorter than usual with the full moon approaching. "So why don't you just bloody well leave me alone."

Upset, Georgie walked out, and Remus lay back and looked at the ceiling. He knew he'd have to go and apologize to Georgie later. On the carpet, the little dark-haired girl continued to crawl around, searching for anything she could find to play with. Spotting Remus' glass of scotch, she slowly made her way across to it, and tentatively put her hand into it, gurgling with delight as she realized it was wet.

Remus looked down at Chloe's excited gurgle, and seeing her hand in his scotch, snapped at the little girl. "Chloe, get your bloody hand out of the glass."

Chloe's bottom lip started to tremble at Remus' harsh remonstration and, feeling like a total shit at taking out his bad mood on the little girl, Remus immediately scooped her up. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. But you don't want the nasty scotch." Remus then tickled her under the chin making her laugh.

Anna, who'd just reached the bottom of the steps leading up to her office, stayed where she was. With her sharp hearing, she'd heard Remus berate her daughter, and had been about to storm up there, when she'd heard his hurried apology and Chloe's bubbling laughter. She continued to listen to the conversation.

Focusing his full attention on Chloe, Remus didn't realize he was being eavesdropped on. Sitting Chloe on his knee, he gently jiggled her up and down. "Shall we go for a ride?"

Chloe screamed with excitement as she bounced up and down, and grabbed Remus' hair making him wince. "Let go of Uncle Remus' hair, Chloe."

“Dada.” Chloe smiled sweetly at Remus, completely throwing him off balance.

“I’m not your Daddy, sweetheart. Daddy’s in the hospital. He’s not very well right now but he’ll be here to play with you before you know it.” As Chloe smiled at him, Remus knew that if Dae ever recovered that he’d have to give the little girl up. It was at that moment that he realized how much he loved the little girl.

“Dada.” Chloe blew a wet kiss at Remus who laughed at her antics.

Anna closed her eyes as tears slipped down her cheeks as she thought about Dae missing out on the precious moment.

After six months it became obvious that Dae wasn’t going to be coming home anytime soon, and Anna sat down to talk to Remus. “Remus, I think it might be a good idea if I looked for somewhere else to live before the end of term.”

Remus went still. “Are you unhappy at Grimmauld Square?”

“It’s not that.” Anna sought for the right words. “Chloe’s so emotionally involved with you, and I don’t want her hurt when you move on.”

Remus put a hand over Anna’s. “I won’t be moving on. I can’t deal with another relationship after losing Lily.” Remus looked over to where the tiny girl was asleep in her playpen. “I swore to Dae before I married you that I’d take care of you and Chloe, and while he’s still in the hospital, that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

Anna got to the heart of the matter. “But we must be a burden. Dad’s already said we can live with him if I don’t want to find somewhere of my own.”

“Is that what you want?” Remus couldn’t bear the thought of Chloe not being there.

“No.” Anna knew that Remus adored her daughter and vice versa. “And I love living with all the children.”

“Then let’s end the conversation.” Remus passed Anna the cup of tea he was making for her. “If you should ever fall in love again, then you should move out, but not because you feel like a burden, because you’re not.”

“It looks as though you could have me for some time then.” Anna felt choked up by Remus’ kindness. “As I’m always going to be in love with Dae, and it could be quite some time before he’s up and about.”

Remus knew that the healers had said that Dae was likely to never recover but he nevertheless smiled at Anna. “That’s good, because who else would do my laundry?”

Anna threw a tea-towel at him. “Idiot.”

Present Time

Dae interrupted Anna. “Chloe calls Remus ‘Dad’?”

Anna knew that this was probably the hardest thing for Dae to hear. “Yes. When she was old enough to understand, Remus explained to her about you and that he really wasn’t her Dad.” Anna laid her hand on Dae’s, glad that he didn’t shake it off. “Chloe still wanted to call him Dad.”

“What does she call me?” Despite his anger towards her, Dae was glad of Anna’s comforting touch.

Anna winced before answering. “Dae.”

Dae closed his eyes at the cold sound of his own name. “What’s her name?”

“I don’t understand.” Anna was confused by the question.

“What’s her last name, Anna?” Dae wondered if Remus had stolen that from him as well.

"Lupin." Anna said quietly. "She didn't want to use your last name."

"She considers Remus her real Dad, doesn't she?" Dae felt like weeping.

"Yes." Anna knew that there was no way of getting away from the fact. "Remus and I have tried time and time again to get her to change her mind about her last name, but she doesn't want to do it. The way she looks at it, her sisters have the same surname and, like most children, she doesn't want to be different."

"You have more children?" Dae felt as if someone had just put the final nail in his coffin.

"We have." Anna felt guilt lance through her at the broken look on Dae's face. "I'm sure you really don't want to talk about though."

"I need to know everything." Dae then waited expectantly for Anna to continue. "And I'd prefer to hear it from you rather than from someone else."

16th July 2002

"Daddy." Chloe sat on Remus' lap, looking at the little boy Luna was holding in her arms. "When can I have a brother?"

Anna snorted her water through her nose as she was taken unawares by Chloe's question. "I thought we'd explained, Chloe. Mummy and Daddy love you so much that we don't need any more children."

Chloe thought for a moment. "If you love me then you must love each other, and Auri said that when Mummies and Daddies love each other then magic gives them babies." Chloe looked up at Remus. "You do love Mummy don't you?"

Remus didn't know what else to say except for yes. "You know that I do."

Chloe slid off Remus' lap and walked over to her mother. "And you love Daddy don't you?"

"I do." Anna felt embarrassed as everyone was now listening.

"So why can't I have a brother?" Chloe folded her arms as she waited for an answer.

Auri cringed at the look her Dad sent her, and hurried to put right what she'd said. "Chloe, you don't really need a little brother. I'm sure Luna will let you help her take care of Damien, and you've already got Emily to play with. Soon Katie will be old enough to play with as well."

Chloe loved Luna's daughters but she shook her head. "I want a baby brother of my own."

Anna held out her hand. "I think it's time we left."

Chloe recognized the diversion for what it was, and sighed. "When can I see Damien again, Luna?"

Luna smiled at the little girl. "Anytime you want to. But he won't be ready to play with you for a little while yet."

"I hope he hurries up. Kai and Robert won't let me play with them." Chloe had been upset when both boys had refused to play dress-up with her and Emily when she'd stayed with her Uncle Grim and Auntie Nia.

"That will change." Remus picked up Emily before ruffling Chloe's hair. "Dudley, look after my grandson."

"I will Dad." Dudley passed Katie to his father. "Are you sure you're okay taking the kids? Mum said she and Grim would do it." Dudley and Luna had moved into Darcy Cottage as soon as Luna had finished school; both of them liked living next door to Grim and Nia.

"All of the girls love having them, and I think your Mum has enough on her hands with Will and the boys." Remus lowered both girls down so that Luna could kiss them. "I think I got the better end of the deal."

Anna took Chloe's hand, and kissed Remus on the cheek. "I'll see you back at home."

Remus was waiting for them when they finally got home. "Is everything alright?"

"It's fine." Anna moved her sleeping daughter to a more comfortable position. "Let me just put her into bed, and I'll be straight back down." Once she'd tucked her daughter in, Anna headed back downstairs and into the sitting room. "I think I'm going to have a glass of wine. Do you want one?"

"I'd love one." Remus sat down. "I'm sorry about Auri telling Chloe about the baby thing."

"It's okay, Rem." Anna smiled. "It was actually really funny." Her face fell a little. "I wish I could give Chloe a little brother. I took Chloe to see Dae after we left you."

"I thought that was where you were going. Any change?" Remus didn't expect there to have been any.

"No." Anna covered her face with her hands. "It's getting so hard, Rem. He just sits there and murmurs; he doesn't even know we're there."

"Auri will find the answer, Anna." Remus knew that his daughter was determined to finish her accelerated learning courses in Muggle medicine as well as healing and was doing everything she could; it had even cost her relationship with Draco who'd gotten fed up of her almost manic obsession with finding a cure for Dae.

"But it's been so long." Anna wiped away a tear. "Sometimes it hard to remember how it felt being with him."

Remus got up and pulled her into his arms. "You know that I'm always here for you."

Anna was grateful for Remus' support, and she dropped a quick affectionate kiss on his lips. "I don't know what I'd have done without you."

Remus felt his heart quicken at the feel of her lips on his, and he released Anna. "And I'd never have managed without you. Cassie and Adrianna only recovered so quickly because of you." Anna Black had decided to use her full name as having two Anna's in the house had been far too confusing.

"Remus?" Anna felt as if Remus had suddenly withdrawn. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing; I'm just tired." Remus sat back down.

Anna let it go and carried on chatting about other things.

2nd February 2003

Peri watched Anna talking to Dae, and she stepped into the room. "Hello Anna."

Anna's face lit up. "Peri. How lovely to see you."

"I was surprised when Healer Grant said you were here." Peri kissed her son on his cheek before sitting down; Dae ignored her and carried on talking softly to himself. "You were here yesterday as well, weren't you?"

Anna glanced over at Dae. "I brought Chloe with me then but this time I wanted to be alone with him."

"You've come to say goodbye, haven't you?" Peri's voice held no censure.

Even so, Anna couldn't meet Peri's eyes. "I hate myself for it."

Peri stood up and tilted Anna's chin up so she had to look at her. "Anna, you're a flesh and blood woman, and Dae might never be the same again."

Anna burst into tears and let Peri enfold her in her arms. "I feel so awful for wanting more."

"It's Remus, isn't it?" Peri wiped Anna's tears away.

Anna nodded. "He doesn't know how I feel though. I haven't told him." She gave a nervous laugh. "He'd probably be horrified."

Peri thought Anna might be surprised. "I doubt that. Are you going to tell him?"

Anna shook her head. "I'm not but I can't keep pretending that I feel the same way about Dae, because I don't."

Peri knew that if Dae ever recovered he was going to be devastated. "I am sorry to hear that but I do understand."

Anna pulled out a handkerchief and blew her nose. "I'm sorry for dumping on you."

"It's quite alright." Peri reassured Anna.

Anna slid off her engagement ring. "I think it only right that I give this to you."

Peri shook her head. "Keep it. I'm sure Chloe would like to have it one day."

Anna slipped the ring into her pocket and moved over to kiss Dae on the cheek. "Goodbye Dae."

Lost in a world of his own, Dae didn't react and Anna kissed Peri before leaving. Peri sighed as the door shut behind Anna. She hadn't been surprised that Anna had decided to move on; she was just surprised that it had taken her this long. Unshrinking the book she had with her, she settled down to spend the afternoon with her son.

August 14th 2003

Anna had been about to get into bed when a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

Remus poked his head around the door. "Do you have any painkilling potions in here?"

"I've got one here." Anna opened her drawer and passed it over. "What's wrong?"

"Tension headache." Remus knocked back the potion. "That's a bit better." He rubbed his neck. "I still ache from that last transformation; the formula wasn't one of Severus' better ones."

Anna pointed to the floor. "Sit down."

Remus did as he was told and gave a contented sigh as Anna started to rub his neck for him. "Between doing my laundry and rubbing my neck, it's hard to pick the real reason I let you stay."

Anna slapped him up the side of the head. "I should hope it's for more than my famous neck rubs and supposedly doing the laundry." The house-elves actually took care of the laundry; it was now something of an in-joke between her and Remus.

Remus tilted his head back. "Well, you're not exactly a great cook, so it can't be for that."

Anna snorted. "Says the man who burns toast."

Remus sounded indignant. "It was only once."

"Once." Anna shook her head. "Someone's going senile."

"I'll show you senile." Remus span round and grabbed her, pulling her onto the floor with him, before beginning to tickle her. "Now say you're sorry."

"No." Anna struggled to break free as Remus continued to torment her. However, as strong as she was, she still wasn't as strong as him. "Okay, okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

Remus leant over her. "Now tell me I'm a great cook."

Anna gave in. "You're a great cook."

Remus kissed her on the nose. "Just remember that the next time."

Anna felt her body respond to Remus' closeness and she reddened, before starting to push Remus off her. "Don't worry I will."

Remus rolled away from her and pulled her to feet, retaining his grip on her hand. "Anna, there's no need to be embarrassed."

"But I am." Anna could barely look at Remus.

Remus put a hand on her face. "I've made you feel uncomfortable; I didn't mean to."

Anna tried to ignore the sensations that were emanating from Remus' touch, and she snapped at him. "Remus, can you please stop touching me? I can't think straight when you do that."

Remus immediately let Anna go. "I'm sorry." He then turned and left.

Anna got into bed; one hour later she was still tossing and turning trying to get to sleep. Knowing that she was fighting a losing battle, she got up and went downstairs. Hearing a noise she headed into the family room, which had once been the drawing room. "Remus. I thought you'd gone to bed."

Remus shrugged and took a mouthful of scotch. "I couldn't sleep so I thought I'd have a nightcap."

Anna immediately felt remorseful. "This is my fault isn't it? I'm sorry I was so short with you." She went and sat down next to Remus on the floor cushions. "Please don't feel guilty about how I reacted to your teasing; you weren't to know I'd have a meltdown."

"I don't." Remus stared into his scotch glass.

"Then why won't you look at me?" Remus hadn't looked at her since she'd walked into the room.

"Because I feel guilty." Remus told her.

Anna was confused. "But you just said that you don't."

"I don't about how you acted. It's been a long time for you, so your reaction was only natural." Remus finally looked at Anna. "I feel guilty about what I wanted to do. Dae's in hospital, and I wanted to make love to you."

"Remus, I've already told you, I no longer feel the same way about Dae, and I'm no longer his fiancée." Anna wanted to reach out and touch Remus but didn't dare.

"One day Auri or someone else will find a cure, and you'll change your mind." Remus looked back down at his scotch. "You only feel the way you do at the moment because he isn't the Dae you fell in love with. Once he recovers, you'll be back with him."

"Remus, he's never going to recover." Anna had finally admitted it to herself when she'd gone to see him for the final time. "Dad's brought in the best healers from all over the word in to see him. They're all of the same opinion; he'll be like this until he dies." Anna could feel tears threatening. "I want to be a mother again; to hold another baby in my arms. I want to be made love to again. I don't want to go through my life alone. I want that feeling of being loved and of loving someone else. Is it so wrong of me to want more?" Anna started to cry softly as she finished speaking.

Remus felt even guiltier about upsetting her. "Come here."

Anna moved into the warmth of Remus' embrace. As she cried quietly, Remus stroked her hair and gently murmured to her. "It will be alright, Anna."

Anna eventually stopped crying, and simply lay there, enjoying the feeling of being held. As Remus eventually released her, she protested. "Please don't let go; hold me."

Remus put his arms back round her. "I'll hold you for as long as you want me to."

Anna swallowed hard. "I don't ever want you to let me go."

Remus stiffened, and Anna looked up at him. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have said that."

Remus searched Anna's face for some sense of how she was feeling. "Do you really mean what you said?"

"Yes." Anna responded nervously as she lifted her hand to cup Remus' face. "I want you for always."

"And I want you too." Remus turned his head to kiss Anna's hand before lowering his head to kiss her lips.

Anna closed her eyes as Remus' lips covered her own, and he softly kissed her, before deepening the kiss. Anna clung to him, wanting more, before pulling away again. "I thought I was, but now I'm not sure I'm ready for this."

"Then we won't do anything." Remus pulled her up. "Anna, I care about you a great deal and I would never do anything to hurt you."

Anna knew that the Remus she'd slept with when she'd been his children's nanny was a far different person than the Remus he was now. She was also aware that he still occasionally saw Claire, the Muggle barmaid, but he certainly didn't go from woman to woman anymore. "I know."

Remus led her upstairs to his room. "Would you like to stay with me tonight?" Seeing the nervous look on Anna's face, Remus smiled softly. "I'm not talking about sex. I just want to be close to you."

Anna wanted the same thing, and she followed Remus into his room before closing the door behind them. "I don't have anything to wear."

"You can wear something of mine." Remus rummaged through his drawers until he found an oversized tee-shirt and some pajama bottoms for himself. "You can use the bathroom first if you want to."

After Anna had used it, Remus went in to get changed. When he returned to the bedroom, Anna was sitting up looking scared. "If you've changed your mind, I'll sleep somewhere else."

Anna shook her head. "Don't go."

Remus stood beside the bed. "Left or right?"

"Right." Anna slid to the side she'd requested and waited for Remus to go around to the other side of the bed.

Remus climbed into bed and held up his arm. "Come here."

Anna slipped into the comfort of his embrace. "Goodnight, Rem."

"Goodnight, Anna." Remus dropped a kiss on her head and closed his eyes.

August 2nd 2004

Chloe looked into the cribs. "Was I that little?"

Anna smiled at her daughter. "You were."

Seville grinned at her Dad. "I can't believe we've going to have even more children in the house. I love it."

"I aim to please." Remus kissed Anna on the lips. "I love you. You are amazing."

"Not as amazing as they are." Anna had been shocked and thrilled to discover that she was not only pregnant but expecting twins.

Auri quietly watched the interaction between her Dad and Anna. Remus glanced over. "Do you want to come with me to get a little fresh air?"

Auri got up. "I'd love to."

Remus waited until they were out of Anna's earshot. "What's wrong, Auri?"

"What about Dae?" Auri didn't bother to prevaricate.

"What about him?" Remus leant against the wall.

"He's got no idea that the woman who was supposed to love him forever has moved on. How do you think he'll feel when he finally recovers?" Auri snapped.

"I told you when I got together with Anna that we didn't set out for this to happen, Auri." Remus and Auri had had a full blown argument when he'd first told her about him and Anna, with Auri not speaking to either of them for almost two months. "It's not as if we jumped into bed the minute he was hospitalized. It's been six years since Dae was admitted; it's only been twelve months since Anna and I got together."

Auri knew she was being unreasonable but for some reason she felt protective of Dae. Not wanting to fall out with Remus again, Auri backed off. "I'm sorry, Dad. I'm just tired, and Tom broke up with me."

"Auri, I'm sorry." Remus pulled his daughter into his arms. "And I'm here rubbing my happiness about my new family in your face."

"Your beautiful new family." Auri kissed Remus on the cheek. "You named Deanna after Dae, didn't you?"

Remus nodded. "I know it will never make up for what's he gone through but we agreed that we wanted one of the girls to be named after him."

"I see Peri and Nic sent the hugest bouquet of flowers." Auri had been taken aback when she'd learnt that Peri and Nic had encouraged Remus and Anna.

“They’re good people, Auri.” Remus knew that not everyone would have been as understanding.

“I know.” Auri kissed Remus on the cheek. “Tell Anna I’ll drop by and see her next week.”

“I will.” Remus watched Auri disappear up the corridor before returning to his wife.

Present Time

Dae looked at Anna. “You really named one of your daughters after me?”

“Dae, I still love you but not in the same way.” Anna looked at where their hands were clasped. “Even though she doesn't really understand, Dee knows she’s named after someone very special.”

Dae felt choked up. “And your other daughter?”

“I’ve actually got two more daughters. “Dee’s twin is called Druscilla Perenelle, and their little sister is Atlanta Lily.”

Dae let go of Anna’s hand. “Are you really happy with Remus?”

Anna nodded. “Very much.”

Dae got up from the bed and walked over to the window. “Goodbye Anna.”

Anna knew that he wanted to be alone, and she left the room, closing the door behind her.

At the window, Dae stared unseeingly out as tears fell unchecked down his cheeks.

Three Days’ Later

Auri pushed open the door, only to receive the same response she'd received every time she'd tried. "Get out." Auri ignored Dae's request this time. "No."

Lying on his bed, looking up at the ceiling, Dae shrugged. "Whatever."

Auri closed the door and went to stand by Dae's bedside. "You need to eat something, Dae."

"I'm not hungry." Dae had sent the orderly who'd tried to bring him food away.

"How about a glass of scotch then?" Auri pulled the bottle of scotch from behind her back.

"Won't you get into trouble for that?" Dae couldn't believe his healer was offering him alcohol.

"Craig gives me leeway to operate however I want to." Auri went into the bathroom. As she picked up a couple of paper cups she noticed that the mirrors still hadn't been replaced. Walking back out, she transfigured the cups into glasses.

Dae took one and laughed sardonically as he turned it around in his hand. "Finally stopped worrying that I'll try and top myself?"

"I didn't think that you would." Auri opened the scotch and poured some out into Dae's glass before filling her own. "I was more concerned about you using the glass on someone else to break your way out of here."

Dae raised an eyebrow. "You think I'd actually threaten someone?"

"I do." Auri didn't hide the fact.

"You're right; I probably would have." Dae admitted. He knocked back the entire glass of scotch in one go, giving a contented sigh as it made its way down his throat. "That's smooth."

"It's my favorite after a really bad day." Auri took a mouthful of her own scotch, savoring the slightly burnt but malty flavor.

"Bad day today?" Dae let Auri refill his glass.

"Very." Auri took another sip of scotch. "But I'm sure you don't want to hear about it."

"You can tell me." Looking closely at her, Dae noticed the dark lines under her eyes. "You look as if you've been burning the candle at both ends."

"That's nothing new." Auri was aware that she put in a lot more hours than most of the healers at St. Mungo's.

"But it's not work that's really bothering you, is it?" Dae asked.

"I broke up with my long-term boyfriend, Daniel on the day you were finally cured." Auri suddenly realized that Dae probably wasn't the right person to be discussing failed relationships with. "Sorry, I should have thought before I opened my big mouth."

"We can wallow together." Dae raised his glass to Auri. "To shitty relationships and their end."

"I'll drink to that." Auri clinked her glass against Dae's and knocked back the rest of her scotch.

"Are you a big drinker?" Dae knew that Remus had had a bit of a drinking problem and he wondered if Auri had the same tendencies.

"Show me a healer or a doctor that isn't." Auri challenged. "We work ridiculously long hours, and sometimes at the end of a really hard day, you want nothing more than a glass of wine."

"Is that what you usually drink?" Dae took a smaller sip of his scotch. After not eating for a few days, it was beginning to make him feel lightheaded already.

“Yes.” Auri smiled. “Actually, I’m lucky if I get through a bottle a week.”

Dae let out a sigh of relief. “I thought you might have been like your Dad for a moment.”

“Dad doesn’t drink like he used to.” Auri admitted. “But let’s not talk about him.”

Dae shook his head. “It’s okay, Auri. I can’t avoid the fact that Remus exists.”

“I bet you’re wishing he didn’t, aren’t you?” Auri had never really been one to avoid an issue.

“I am.” Dae responded honestly. “Right now I feel as if my world has come to an end but from experience I know that it will get better.”

“It hurts to know that someone you love is with someone else.” Auri sighed. “I should know. I’ve been there.”

“Daniel?” Dae asked curiously.

“No, Draco.” Auri refilled both of their glasses. “We broke up a few years after I left school and he moved on.”

“I know it’s been some time but do you want to talk about it?” Dae was interested in finding out what had happened.

“I’m fine with it now, but back then, it was hard.” Auri thought back to when Draco had told her he’d had enough.

10th April 2002

“I’m sorry, Auri.” Draco held his soon to be ex-girlfriend as she sobbed. “But I can’t compete with Dae.”

Auri lifted her tear-drenched face. “You’re not competing with him.”

“But I am.” Draco wiped away her tears. “I’m never going to come first while you feel the need to atone for what happened to him.”

Auri couldn’t stop crying. “I need you.”

“And I love you.” Draco kissed her lips gently. “But I can’t stay in a relationship where I’m always going to rank behind all of this.” Draco waved his hand at the books that littered the floor.

Auri looked at the various medical texts that were spread across her bedroom floor. “You’re training to become a healer as well. You know how much work it takes.”

“You went through two years of college in eight months and now you’re trying to cram five years of study into three...” Draco pointed out. “...as well as trying to become a Muggle doctor on top of everything else; it’s just madness.”

“I have to.” Auri was adamant. “Dae needs someone to help him.”

Draco’s voice was gentle. “Auri, the top healers around the globe have examined him. There’s nothing you can do.”

“I refuse to believe that.” Auri pulled out of Draco’s embrace. “I’ll never give up.”

“I’m well aware of that.” Draco had got fed up of the times Auri had cancelled their dates because she had a test or a paper due.

“You’re really finishing with me, aren’t you?” Auri asked in a quiet voice.

“I’ll always be your friend.” Draco pulled her back into his arms as she broke down and cried again. “But I can’t be your boyfriend anymore.”

Present Time

Dae stared at Auri. “You really did sacrifice everything for me, didn’t you? Your social life, your boyfriend and your time.”

"Voldemort would never have gotten his hands on you if I hadn't stupidly ended up at Hogwarts with you." Auri told him.

Dae turned to face Auri. "It was never your fault. I could have waited to go after Cassie and Scarlett; I should have simply apparated you home."

Auri didn't believe that Dae didn't blame her. "Anyway, what's done is done."

"Are you still in touch with Draco?" Dae wondered what had happened to his cousin's son.

"Definitely." Auri grinned. "He's married to my sister."

Dae was completely stunned. "That must have hurt."

"A little." Auri sighed. "I think their wedding day was when I realized that I hadn't quite gotten over him as much as I thought I had."

4th April 2006

Remus led his daughter onto the dance floor and kissed her on the cheek. "Have I told you how beautiful you look?"

"Only about ten times, Dad." Scarlett grinned at him. "You look quite distinguished yourself."

"You mean old, don't you?" Remus smiled down at Scarlett. It seemed only yesterday that he had been changing her diaper.

"I can hardly accuse you of that." Scarlett looked over to where Anna was surrounded by children. "I can't believe Anna is about to give birth again."

"This will be the last one." Remus swore. "If it wasn't for Robert and Will I would have disappeared under a sea of girls."

As Scarlett laughed, Auri looked over from where she was dancing with Draco. "You'd better take good care of my sister, Black."

"I'm probably one of the few guys on the planet who can say that his father-in-law would literally tear him apart with his bare hands, if he didn't." Draco responded. "So who's the poor sap whose with you this time?"

"Daniel Gallagher." Auri waved at the young man she'd started seeing a few weeks earlier. "He's a Muggle doctor at St. Bart's."

"You brought a Muggle to a wizarding wedding?" Draco was aghast.

"I told him about me a few months after we met." Auri explained. "Back then he was just my friend though."

"That was taking a chance wasn't it?" Draco knew that Auri sometimes flew close to the edge.

"What's life without a few risks?" Auri grinned at Draco. "And anyway, I told him if he tells anyone he'll turn into a frog."

Draco let out a bark of laughter. "And he believed you?"

"After showing him my animagus form and apparating, he pretty much believes I can do anything." Auri had enjoyed seeing the shocked look on Daniel's face when she'd morphed into a swan.

"You still haven't told him that nothing would happen, have you?" Draco knew how Auri worked.

"Nope." Auri smirked. "And I'm not going to either."

Draco drifted closer to where Remus was dancing with Scarlett. "I can't believe I'm so lucky."

Auri tamped down on the jealousy that shafted through her at the totally besotted look that Draco gave her sister. "Well you are, and you'd better take good care of her." She waved at her Dad. "Now swing us over there and we'll swap."

Auri watched as Draco danced with his wife for a short time before leading her from the room. She sighed. Remus squeezed her hand. "I know it doesn't seem like it now, but it'll be your turn one day."

"I doubt it; I seem to have a habit of frightening them away." Auri sighed again.

"Perhaps this one will be different." Remus had met Daniel and liked him.

"I hope so." Auri kissed Remus on the cheek as the music stopped. "I'll see you later Dad."

Present Time

Dae couldn't help but be shocked. "Little Scarlett is married to Draco?"

Auri laughed out loud. "Happily. They've got a little girl called Devon who's spoiled rotten by both of them."

"Does Draco work here?" Dae asked, remembering Auri's comment about Draco training to be a healer.

Auri nodded. "It was him who called me on the night you recovered."

"Can I see him?" Dae suddenly found he wanted contact with other people.

"Of course." Auri was pleased that Dae had asked. "Narcissa would like to see you as well."

Dae felt relief flood through him that his cousin had survived. "Tell her I look forward to seeing her."

Auri giggled as Dae's stomach suddenly growled. "I think your stomach is trying to tell you something."

Dae had to admit that he was suddenly pretty hungry. "Thanks for listening to me."

“Actually, I think it was you listening to me.” Auri stood up. “I’ll leave this with you.” Auri placed the remainder of the bottle of scotch on the bedside table. “I’ll ask one of the staff to bring you some food. Is there anything you want?”

“Anything will be fine.” Dae watched Auri leave the room. Pouring himself another drink, he sat back to wait for his food.

16th May 2011

Auri looked up from her notes. “Dae, what brings you in?”

“I was in the area and decided to see if my favorite healer would like to join me for dinner.” Dae looked hopefully at Auri.

Auri closed what she was working on. “Give me a minute.”

Dae waited while Auri tidied up. “Thanks for keeping me company.”

“It’s nice to get away from this place occasionally.” Auri dimmed the lights. “I’m probably not dressed properly.”

“You’re dressed perfectly for where we’re going.” Dae reassured her. “Now come on.”

Auri followed him to the apparition point. Dae held out his arm. “I’ll side apparate you.”

“Not my favorite.” Auri nevertheless grabbed on. When they arrived, she looked round. “Dae, this is your home.”

Dae led her outside to where French, who’d moved back in with Dae after he’d been released from St. Mungo’s, had set up a table. “I couldn’t think of anywhere better and I knew you’d be worried about what to wear.”

Auri smiled at his thoughtfulness. “Thank you.”

French appeared. “Glass of wine, Miss Auri?”

“White please, French.” Auri took the glass. “This is exactly what I needed.”

The pair of them then chatted companionably over the perfectly grilled steaks that French had produced.

Dae watched Auri push her plate away. “For a little thing you certainly can put food away, can’t you?”

“Steak is my absolute favorite.” Auri admitted. “I’ll probably regret it when I have heartburn in the morning.”

“I find it hard to believe you ever regret anything.” Dae pushed away from the table and held out his hand. “Do you want to take a walk in the gardens before it gets dark?”

Never having really had the chance to do so before, Auri took his hand and the two of them strolled around the pathways which were lined with small lanterns. As they reached the top of the hill, Auri gasped. “Dae, the view’s amazing.”

“It’s one of the reasons I bought this place.” Since he’d been released from hospital, he’d spent most of his spare time simply walking in the gardens.

“I think I can safely say for the first time in my life, I actually envy something someone else has.” Auri sat down in the arbor which overlooked the hillside. “All I need now is my glass of wine.”

“I can grant that wish.” Dae called out. “French.” When the elf appeared he gave him his order. “Can you please top up our glasses and bring them out here?”

A few minutes later Auri was sitting in the rose-infused arbor watching the sunset, her wine glass in her hand. “I can’t remember the last time I felt this relaxed.”

“Me neither.” Dae admitted. “I know my colleagues and parents mean well but I sometimes feel as if they’re crowding me. I don’t feel as if I get any time on my own.”

“Would you like me to leave?” Even though Dae had invited her, she almost felt like an intruder at his words.

“You’re different.” Dae glanced over at the young woman. “You don’t mollycoddle me as if you expect me to fall apart at any second. Everyone else avoids even mentioning Anna and Remus if I’m there.”

“Are you really over her?” Auri took a sip of the crisp, white wine.

“I’m nothing if not pragmatic.” Dae shielded his eyes as the sun began to move lower in the sky. “I’m hardly going to try and break up a perfectly good marriage. I’m just glad that Anna’s happy.” Dae had patched up his relationship with Remus and Anna a few months earlier, not wanting animosity between them because of his daughter. “I admit it hurt at first but better that she’s with Remus than what I believed when Bella got her hands on me.”

“Sirius was a nasty bastard, wasn’t he?” Auri rarely mentioned her uncle; she put down her wine glass and stood up turning her back to the sun. “I think he’s something best left to the past. I certainly don’t want his memory ruining my perfectly pleasant evening.”

Dae knew what she meant. “Sit back down and I’ll cast a shadow.”

Auri sat back down and protected her eyes as Dae cast a spell that shielded the arbor from the glare of the sun. “That’s better.”

Dae sighed and leant back against the bench. “I think this has to be the nicest evening I’ve had since I recovered.”

“I’m glad.” Auri placed her hand on his.

The two of them sat quietly as the sun began its final descent behind the horizon. Dae eventually held out his hand again. “It will soon get chilly. Let’s get back indoors.”

Once they were inside, Dae waved his wand at his stereo player. "I can blame you for having something so Muggle here."

"I find listening to music relaxing." Auri knew that a lot of her patients did as well.

"So do I." Dae sat down next to her. "So how are things coming along in the romance department?"

"The same as ever." Auri grinned ruefully at Dae. "I split up with yet another boyfriend a few weeks ago."

"But now I'm cured, I thought you had more time on your hands." Dae wished Auri would find someone who made her happy. After what she'd sacrificed for him, he wanted to see her settle down.

"I do." Auri put down her glass. "Somehow I still seem to rub people up the wrong way."

"I don't see it." Dae had a good relationship with Auri, and they often met for lunch or dinner just to talk.

"You must be wearing blinkers then." Auri turned the focus onto Dae. "So, how's your love life?"

"I haven't been on a date since my disastrous evening with Collette." About three months previously, Dae had decided he was ready to date again, and had asked one of the female Aurors out on a date. He'd been fed up with her inane chatter before they'd even been served the first course. "I think I might wait a little longer before I try again."

"Or at least try and pick someone you have something in common with." Auri suggested.

"I thought we had plenty in common, but she was just so boring and empty-headed." Dae could see that Auri was trying not to laugh. "You go out with her; you'll see what I mean."

Auri shook her head. "Unlike Cassie, I prefer my partners to be male."

Dae had been initially shocked when he'd been introduced to Cassie and her girlfriend, Chelsea. "I still can't quite believe that Cassie has a girlfriend."

"She's happy so we don't really care." Auri and her family had welcomed Chelsea in the same way they would have if she'd been a boy.

"Neither do I." Dae thought Chelsea had a wicked sense of humor. "Now Chelsea would have been fun to go on a date with."

"Except that she's thirty years younger than you, and Cassie would have had something to say about it." Auri pointed out. "Speaking of Cassie, have you eaten at the Black Wolf yet?" Cassie, Scarlett and Sophia Malfoy had opened up a restaurant together after they'd left school. Anna's father had been their backer as the three girls had refused everyone's offer of help, and they'd taken out a commercial loan from Mac Jameson. They'd surprised everyone with the success of their restaurant, allowing them to repay the loan within two years.

Dae had. "I had to use my connection to the girls to get a table, and even then I had to go on a waiting list."

Auri was proud of what the girls had achieved. "You're not alone. I usually book at least a month in advance to get in."

"I'll remember that." Dae grinned. "I have to be honest; I was more surprised to find out that Georgie had married Nott than I was about Cassie."

"Not as surprised as we were when they started dating." Auri hadn't particularly liked the boy. "But they've been married since Georgie turned eighteen and they're still happy, so who am I to judge, particularly given my track record?"

Dae chuckled Auri under the chin. "You'll find someone."

"If I don't, then you can keep me company when I'm old and single." Auri laughed at the idea of her and Dae having this same sort of

conversation sometime in the future. "Can you just imagine it? We'll probably still be sitting here in fifty years' time feeling just as sorry for ourselves."

"Speak for yourself." Dae stuck his tongue out at Auri. "I intend to eventually settle down." He sighed. "If I can find someone who doesn't bore me to death first."

Auri let out a gurgle of laughter. "Well if you don't, the offer still stands to keep you company."

"I'll bear it in mind." Dae answered wryly.

Auri yawned. "Sorry, Dae but I really need to head home. It's been a busy week."

Dae pulled her to her feet, and kissed her on the cheek. "I'm going to be in Paris for a fortnight advising the French Minister on revamping their Auror division but I'll be free for lunch when I get back."

Auri felt regret that she wouldn't be around. "I'm going to be in the States for a month lecturing on your recovery."

Dae hated being the center of attention, even from a distance. "Good luck with that."

Auri knew how Dae felt about the fame his recovery had brought him in the wizarding world. "If you don't mind me using your kitchen, how about I cook you dinner here when I get back?"

"No." Dae's response was immediate. "Considering what great cooks your mother and sister are, you are probably one of the worst cooks I've ever had the misfortune to come across."

"Don't pander to my ego, will you?" Auri knew that she could do a great Bolognese but that was the total of her limited repertoire. "I'll tell you what then; you arrange something and leave me a message."

"I'll do that." Dae was relieved that Auri hadn't been too upset by his refusal to eat her cooking; once had been enough.

Auri lifted a hand before disappearing.

1st July 2011

Auri had extended her stay in the US after being asked by the USHA to do so. Her seminars had been overbooked and new dates had had to be added. Enthused by the response, Craig had agreed to it, so Auri had regretfully had to cancel the dinner appointment with Dae they'd set up more than two months earlier.

She was about to make her way down to dinner when a knock sounded on her hotel room door. Opening it she was surprised to find Dae standing there. Hugging him, she pulled him inside. "Dae, what are you doing here?"

"I was bored." Dae told her. "So I booked an international portkey and decided to visit you."

Auri was delighted to see a friendly face. "When do you want to get together?"

"I thought now would be good." Dae teased. "I take it you do eat dinner still?"

Auri hesitated for a moment before nodding. "Let me just cancel my plans."

Dae stopped her. "I'm sorry. I should have realized you'd already have plans."

Auri smiled at him. "It was just a dinner with some of the team from US Healers Association; nothing important."

Dae had a feeling she wasn't being entirely honest with him. "Tell me the truth, Auri."

"I've actually been offered a position to head up the Research Department into brain diseases by the Stafford Institute right here in Orlando." Auri admitted. "We were meeting to discuss the terms."

Dae was stunned. "You're moving?"

"I don't know yet." Auri told him. "Stay here. I'll reshuffle my appointment."

Dae shook his head. "I'm staying in a suite on this floor. Go to your dinner, and I'll see you for breakfast in my room at eight, if you're free."

"I am. I've got nothing scheduled for the whole weekend." Auri picked up her wrap. "Thanks for understanding."

"Don't be silly." Dae kissed her on the cheek. "I'm the one who butted in. Now go to your meeting."

Dae walked her to the elevator before returning to his suite. Opening the door, he poured out a scotch and looked at the bright lights of Disney's Magic Kingdom through the large windows in the sitting room. Unbeknown to the Muggles, Walt Disney and his brother had been squibs and in addition to Muggles had chosen to cater for wizards and witches as well. He'd been surprised when he'd found out that Auri had chosen to stay in such a touristy area when she could have easily stayed in the hotel where the conference she'd been lecturing was.

Deciding to take a walk, Dae put down his glass and headed out of his room.

14th October 2011

Auri rushed to meet Dae as he entered the building. "Dae."

"You look wonderful." Dae was surprised to see how relaxed Auri looked. "I see running your own department has its benefits."

"I've never been so happy." Auri began to tell Dae about what she was doing there as they made their way up to the lab where she spent most of her time. "It's a fantastic facility, and some of my

colleagues have been able to offer insight into ideas I'd never have thought of."

Auri placed her wand into a hole when they reached a blank wall. "Aurilia Lupin."

The wall slid back to reveal a state of the art department. Dae was stunned. "You've got Muggle technology."

"It's actually hybrid technology." Auri grabbed her friend's hand. "Come meet Richard. He does all the paperwork for me so I can get on with other things."

Dae took an immediate dislike to the blond man sitting behind a large cherry wood desk. Auri smiled brightly at him. "Richard, this is Felidae Venant."

Richard got up and held out his hand. "I'm so pleased to meet the person that helped make all this possible. Auri's always talking about you."

"I wouldn't say I made all this possible." Dae was surprised to find that Richard had a firm handshake. "Auri's the one who did all the work. I just lay there and let her."

Richard laughed. "Either way, it all boils down to you."

Dae felt a little like a lab rat that was about to be dissected. "Enough about me. Auri tells me that you deal with most of her paperwork."

"I enjoy that part of the job." Richard looked at his watch. "Sorry to rush you out when you've only just arrived, but I've booked a table at Ravish for the three of us."

Dae was disappointed that he wouldn't get to spend some time alone with his friend. "Is there somewhere I can wash up before we go?"

"Come with me." Auri led Dae out of the room. "Richard's nice isn't he?"

“I don’t really know him that well.” Dae followed Auri into a bright and spacious office. “This is yours?”

Auri looked a little embarrassed. “It is but I rarely use it.” She pointed to a door on the far wall. “There’s a bathroom you can use in there.”

After washing up, Auri led Dae back out to the entrance where Richard was waiting for them. “We can walk to Ravish from here.”

Dae found that the restaurant was only around the corner. “It looks nice.”

Auri loved the restaurant. “I quite often have lunch here. The owner, Antoinette, is French and a fantastic chef. She was going to call the restaurant Radish but the sign maker misunderstood her French accent, and it became Ravish.”

Dae laughed. Auri led the way in, greeting Antoinette as she would an old friend. “Antoinette, this is my great friend, Dae Venant.”

“Bonjour, Monsieur Venant.” Antoinette initially addressed Dae in French. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“Bonjour, Madam.” Dae returned the courtesy and instead of shaking Antoinette’s hand, took it and raised it to his lips. “Auri speaks highly of you.”

Antoinette winked at the girl she’d become firm friends with in the space of a few months. “Likewise.”

Antoinette then led the group to a secluded table. Auri looked up at her friend. “Would you like to join us?”

Dae hid his groan at Auri’s obvious ploy. Antoinette knew what Auri was up to and shook her head. “I cannot; I’m afraid we’re busy today.”

After saying goodbye to her friend, Auri smiled at Dae. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

“So am I.” Dae and Auri chatted about their respective lives for a few minutes before Dae remembered Richard, and not wanting to appear rude, drew him into the conversation. “So Richard, how long have you been working at the Stafford Institution?”

“About ten years.” Richard felt a little jealous of Dae’s rapport with Auri. “I take it you’ve known Auri here for a long time.”

“Since she was quite small.” Dae smirked at Auri. “I’ve known her father for even longer.”

“I expect her parents miss her.” Richard pulled a piece of bread from the basket that the server brought over.

“They most certainly do.” Dae had been to see both Remus and Nia before he’d left.

Auri decided to change the subject as she didn’t want to get upset; she loved her job but she missed her family terribly. “Speaking of families, Richard’s father finances the Institution.”

“So your father must be Taylor Stafford then.” Dae had had the Institution investigated before Auri had started working there.

“But you already knew that didn’t you?” Richard had been aware that Dae had known who he was from the moment they’d first met.

“I did.” Dae admitted. “I wasn’t going to let the daughter of a friend work somewhere that wasn’t above board.”

Auri was stunned. “You checked out the Institution?”

“Remus asked me to.” Dae had intended to do it anyway before Remus had asked.

Auri stood up. “Excuse me for a moment.”

Richard watched her walk away. “I don’t think she’s very happy with you.”

Dae shrugged. "She's a friend and I take care of my friends."

"I can understand that." Richard took the wine list off the waiter before making a selection and then returning his attention to Dae. "I asked Auri to invite me along for a reason. Dad wants to offer you a position at the Institution."

Dae hadn't been expecting that. "Why me?"

"We need someone to head up our security department. Your credentials are exceptional. Also I attended one of the seminars you ran a couple of months ago. We need someone of your caliber on our team." Richard didn't like Dae but he wasn't lying about what he thought of his work.

"I can't believe you can't get an American to do the job." Dae thanked the waiter who returned with the bottle of wine; swilling the red wine around his glass before he took a mouthful, Dae nodded appreciatively; Richard had good taste.

"I can." Richard acknowledged. "But for some reason Dad wants you."

"I have no idea why." Despite himself, Dae was intrigued; his job at the Ministry no longer appealed to him. "I'll tell you what, set me up a meeting with him, and I'll discuss it."

Richard smiled as he spotted Auri returning. "I'll do that."

Later that evening

Dae waited in the foyer for Auri to fetch her things. Spotting her coming towards him with Richard, he stood up. "Are you ready?"

"Just about." Auri turned and kissed Richard on the cheek. "I'll see you on Monday morning."

Richard held out his hand to Dae. "Goodnight, Dae."

“Goodnight.” Dae shook Richard’s hand before offering his arm to Auri. “Is there somewhere to apparate from?”

Auri nodded and led Dae to the relevant area. “Hold tight.”

Dae did so and moments later found himself standing on the ground floor of a large open plan house. He whistled. “Some house.”

“It came as part of the package.” Auri opened the fridge. “Can I get you a glass of wine or scotch?”

“Scotch, please.” Dae watched Auri pull out a bottle of white wine before fixing them both drinks.

“Come through to the patio.” Auri led the way out to the patio.

Dae wasn’t surprised to find a large swimming pool dominating the area. “Do you like living here?”

“I love it.” Auri adored her house and the mild weather.

Dae sat down on the padded sofa and grinned. “This is very pleasant.”

“I usually end up out here most nights.” Auri pulled off her shoes and sat on a cushion, dangling her feet in the water. “So tell me. What did you think of Antoinette?”

“I knew you were matchmaking.” Dae decided to copy Auri and slid down next to her.

“You said most women were boring.” Auri defended what she’d done. “Antoinette is anything but.”

“I’ll pass but thank you.” Dae gave a sigh as the warm water lapped over his trousers.

“You’ll ruin those.” Auri informed him.

Dae wasn't bothered. "I'll just buy another pair. Talking about matchmaking; are you dating Richard?"

"Sort of." Auri admitted. "We've been on a few dinner dates but nothing more than that."

Dae was glad. "I have to admit, I don't particularly like him."

"I didn't think so." Auri wasn't stupid. "Is it because his Dad funds the Institute?"

"No." Dae put down his glass. "I don't know what it is."

"Yet you've agreed to meet his father about the security position." Auri was puzzled by Dae's attitude.

"Taylor Stafford is nothing like his son." Dae knew Taylor from school. "He was in Slytherin like me."

"Does he know you were Regulus Black?" Auri asked.

"I have no idea." Dae knew that he wouldn't have been surprised if Taylor had. Even at school the boy had always seemed to know things, even when they'd been private and no-one else should have known about them. "Either way, I'll find out tomorrow."

"It would be nice to have a friendly face over here." Auri stood up. "Come on, dinner should be ready by now."

Dae followed Auri back into the house.

2nd November 2011

Dae knew that he would miss his home in England but knew that Fisher, French's cousin would take good care of it. Taylor had indeed somehow known that Dae had been Regulus, which was one of the reasons he'd wanted Dae. Dae knew that he'd have been a fool to turn the position down and quicker than he could have believed, he found himself in a new house.

Auri looked around the room. "I think this house is nicer than mine."

Dae grinned. "And I've definitely got a far superior pair of house-elves to take care of me."

Auri threw a pillow at him. "I can always steal Pasha from you, you know."

"She won't leave her husband and son." Dae picked up the pillow. "Come on, French should have finished dinner by now."

After the pair had eaten dinner, Auri flopped onto the sofa next to Dae. "I'm so glad you're here."

"So am I." Dae put his arm around Auri and let her lean against him. "I've missed our chats."

"So have I." Auri snuggled closer to Dae. "I don't know what it is, but I never feel as relaxed with anyone else, as I do with you."

Dae laughed. "That's probably because I let you use me as a human cushion."

Auri giggled. "And you love every minute of it."

Dae had been about to make a glib response when he realized what Auri was saying was true. Recovering, he made the response he'd intended to. "I've got to be good for something."

"You're good for plenty of things." Auri continued, not realizing that Dae was frowning. "Who else is willing to listen to me for hours on end?"

"That's what friends do." Dae responded almost automatically. He yawned. "I think portkey lag has caught up with me."

Auri got up. "I'll let you get to bed then." She promptly dropped a kiss on his head and apparated out.

Dae walked over to the patio door and looked at his reflection in the glass. "I'm such a fucking idiot." He now knew why he didn't like Richard; he was the competition. "She'll never want someone as old as me."

Pouring himself a scotch, Dae continued to drink the entire bottle until French appeared. "Are you alright, Master Dae?"

Dae shook his head, his voice slurring as he spoke to his house-elf. "Nope."

French wasn't quick enough as Dae tried to get up, only to slip on the tiled floor, his head clipping the table as he fell. Dae crawled to his knees, and put his hand to his head. "Oops."

French apparated out and returned with Auri a few minutes later. Auri rushed over to Dae, her medical bag with her. "Dae, French said you'd injured yourself."

Dae looked at Auri, trying to focus on her. Auri wrinkled her nose at the smell of scotch and ran her hands over Dae's head. "Let me heal that."

Dae waited patiently as Auri healed the cut. "I'm drunk."

"Let's get you to bed." Auri wondered what had driven Dae to drink so much. "Put your arm around me."

Dae obediently let Auri help him up. Thankfully the Master bedroom was on the first floor. Auri dropped Dae onto the bed. "French, can you undress him and get him into bed. I'll pop home and get a hangover potion for him for the morning."

When Auri returned Dae was lying asleep in his bed. Placing the potion on the bedside cabinet, Auri ran her hand over Dae's head checking that the spell had taken properly; it had been a few months since she'd actively practiced medicine. Dae moaned lightly and turned his head to kiss Auri's hand.

Auri giggled; she knew that Dae would be embarrassed if he knew what he'd done. She called French. "Do you know why he was drinking like that? He said he'd got portkey lag so I presumed he was going to bed after I left."

French had a fair idea of what was troubling his master, and decided to enlighten Auri. "He said something about a woman not wanting someone as old as him." French had caught that much of the conversation Dae had had with himself.

Auri sat down on the edge of the bed. She knew that Dae wasn't going to wake anytime soon. "So he must be pining over someone. No wonder he wasn't interested in Antoinette." She ran a hand through her hair, a habit she'd picked up from her brother. "I wonder if that's why he decided to take the job over here; to get over this woman." Auri frowned. "I thought he would have told me about her."

French wanted to slap Auri for her denseness but knowing that it wasn't his place, and he'd said as much he dared, he bowed to her. "Goodnight, Miss Auri."

"Goodnight French." Auri decided to stay with Dae overnight. He'd got a slight concussion, and she didn't want to leave him alone. Setting up a ward, she slipped into the bed beside Dae, quickly falling asleep.

Dae groaned as he woke up; his head felt as if it was going to explode. Suddenly reality intruded on his sleep-befuddled mind; there was a warm body tucked up against him. Sitting up, Dae realized that it was Auri. He wondered why she was asleep in his bed. French suddenly appeared and held a finger to his lips. Dae slid out of the bed, grabbing the potion Auri had left for him before following French into the bathroom.

"Why is Auri in my bed?" Dae swallowed the potion as he turned the shower on.

"You fell and hit your head, Master Dae." French snapped his fingers and towels appeared together with a set of clothing. "I fetched Miss Auri."

French then disappeared and left Dae to his shower.

Dae remembered drinking and had a vague recollection of someone helping him to his bed. He smacked his hand against his head. "Great way to sweep her off her feet, Venant."

After showering, Dae re-entered his bedroom to find Auri, changed and sitting at the table eating a bowl of fresh fruit. "I hope you don't mind but French offered."

"Of course not." Dae felt a little uncomfortable around Auri now he'd worked out how he really felt about her. "I'm sorry you had to deal with me."

Auri beamed up at him. "It's quite alright. French explained everything."

Dae was horrified. "What?"

Auri put down her fork. "French intimated that you're troubled romantically."

Dae dropped his head into his hands. "I'll kill him."

"Dae, why didn't you tell me?" Auri was a little hurt that Dae hadn't confided in her. "I would have been there for you."

"You couldn't have done anything." Dae just wanted to change the subject.

Auri, however, wasn't ready to let the conversation go. "French mentioned something about you thinking you're too old for someone."

Dae really was going to strangle his house-elf. "Auri, believe me, it doesn't matter now."

Auri disagreed. "It must do for you to have gotten so drunk you almost passed out."

Normally Dae loved Auri's tenaciousness, but not that morning. "Auri, I'll get over it."

"Who is she?" Auri asked.

"I really don't want to discuss this." Dae waited for Auri to get the message.

Unfortunately fate had other plans for him. "And why do you think you're too old?"

"Because I'm fifty, Auri." Dae knew he was being short but right now, he didn't want to discuss the matter with the object of his affections.

"And how old is she?" Auri began on her yogurt, ignoring Dae's brusqueness.

Dae gave in and sat down. "She's in her late twenties."

"I can't see the problem." Auri waved her spoon in the air. "You certainly don't look that old, and being a wizard, it isn't exactly a big deal."

"Okay." Dae tried to placate her. "I'm not too old but it doesn't matter either way as she isn't interested in me like that."

"Are you entirely sure?" Auri was a like a dog with a bone.

"Quite sure." Dae found that he had no appetite and got up. "So what have you got planned for today?"

Auri knew that Dae was trying to change the subject so she finally backed off. "Nothing. I've cleared my schedule so that I can spend the entire weekend with you."

Dae hid his dismay and delight. "How about spending the day at Disney World?"

Auri was a child at heart and she grinned. "I'd love to."

Ten hours later Dae's feet were killing him as he walked towards the exit, his arm slung around Auri's shoulder. "Remind me never to come here again."

Auri laughed. "You know you loved it."

"I did." Dae admitted. "But not as much as you."

"Let's go to Downtown Disney." Auri didn't want the evening end.

"Let's go to the Boardwalk instead." Dae wanted to go somewhere a little less crowded.

After getting drinks for them, Dae leant against the railing, looking out over the lagoon. "This is a really nice spot."

"I know." Auri had gone there several times just to people watch and relax. "When I get married, I want it to take place here."

Dae felt his heart sink. "Do you really think Richard would like it?"

"I can't ever see me marrying Richard." Auri liked him but knew that he wasn't right for her. "He doesn't make me laugh, and despite everything, he's a little bit boring." She smiled up at Dae. "Perhaps that's what makes a good relationship; laughter and the ability not to bore each other to death." Auri took a sip of her drink. "If you weren't my friend, I'd have said you would be perfect for me."

Dae froze. Auri was immediately apologetic. "I'm sorry; I've embarrassed you, haven't I?" Auri slapped her forehead. "I always manage to ruin a perfectly moment. This is why my relationships don't last. I'm an idiot."

"I think it's time we got back." Dae suddenly found that he needed some time alone.

"I have embarrassed you." Auri grabbed Dae's arm and looked around before apparating them both away.

“Auri!” Dae wasn’t impressed by her stunt. “Do you realize how many Muggles might have seen that?”

“They’d just dismiss it.” Auri patted the sofa. “I’m really sorry about my comment.”

Dae sat down next to her. “It doesn’t matter and you didn’t embarrass me; I just didn’t expect a comment like that.”

“Why ever not?” Auri put down the drink she was still holding. “Just because the woman you like doesn’t want you, doesn’t mean that someone else wouldn’t.” Auri decided to try and buoy up Dae’s ego. “You’re good looking, rich, funny, talented, and a great conversationalist.”

“So why am I still single?” Dae asked wryly.

“Because you just haven’t met the right woman.” Auri was convinced that that was the problem.

“I have met the right woman but as I told you this morning, she doesn’t see me like that.” Dae reminded her.

“Well if she can’t see what’s right beneath her nose, then she’s an idiot.” Auri told him.

Dae got up and walked over to the window. “Auri, I think you should go.”

Auri ignored Dae’s comment and, joining him at the window, placed a hand on his back. “I’m not leaving you alone to get drunk again.”

Dae had had enough, and couldn’t bear to have Auri touching him. “For fuck’s sake, Auri. Are you so bloody obtuse?”

Auri removed her hand and stepped backwards. “Dae?”

“The woman who can’t see what’s under her nose. It’s you, Auri.” Dae stormed over to the table and grabbed the bottle of scotch that French had left out for him. “You can see yourself out.”

Auri stood in the middle of the room completely stunned. Not knowing what to do for the best, Auri apparated home. Once there, she found that she was shaking. Sensing that her mistress was home, Auri's house-elf Melina appeared. "Can I get you anything Mistress Auri?"

"White wine, please." Auri answered automatically; her mind already on what Dae had told her.

As Auri took the wine from Melina, she thought about how close she and Dae had become. She'd mistakenly believed that Dae was just a friend. It was only finding out how Dae felt about her, that she realized he meant more than that to her. As the night progressed she thought about all the times they'd spent together. In retrospect, she knew that she should have realized that she was in love him. Dae's words had acted as if someone had lifted a veil and she could suddenly see clearly. Finishing her third glass of wine, Auri reflected on what she'd told him at the Boardwalk. Everything she'd said had been true. Looking at the clock and discovering that it was almost 4am, she decided it was too late to return to Dae's, and she headed for bed.

18th November 2011

Dae scowled as Richard stopped him. "I want to talk to you."

Dae led Richard into his office. "What is it?"

"When are you going to give Auri a chance?" Richard didn't mess around.

"I don't know what you mean." Dae wouldn't look at Richard.

"You tell her you're in love with her and then refuse to see her." Richard was angry at Dae.

"I didn't tell her anything of the sort." Dae hadn't put his feelings into words.

"But you are, aren't you?" Richard, like Auri, was tenacious.

“Yes.” Dae admitted.

“Then give her a chance to talk to you.” Richard opened the door.
“She needs you.”

“No, she doesn’t.” Dae denied Richard’s supposition.

“Then why has she lost weight and is barely eating enough to keep a bird alive?” Richard stepped out of the room. “Think about what I said.”

30th November 2011

Dae woke up to find himself in a room he didn’t recognize. “What the hell?”

“Good morning.” Auri stood over him. “There are fresh towels in the bathroom.”

Dae groaned. “Don’t tell me, French?”

Auri nodded. “If the mountain won’t come to Mohammed – you get the drift.”

Dae crossed his arms. “This isn’t a game, Auri.”

“I know that.” Auri walked out of the room.

After showering, Dae entered the more familiar territory of Auri’s sitting room. “You look terrible.”

“Shower me with compliments, why don’t you.” Auri knew she’d lost weight.

“Auri, why are you doing this to yourself?” Dae asked quietly.

“Because of you.” Auri could feel herself shaking. “You insinuate you’re in love with me, and then you ignore me.”

"I didn't mean to upset you." Dae stepped towards Auri, and put a hand on her arm. "But I needed some space after spilling my guts to you."

Auri, who rarely cried, could feel tears close to the surface. "I can understand that. But it's been a bloody month, Dae, four whole weeks." She then burst into tears.

Dae felt like a complete bastard and pulled her into his arms. "I'm sorry, Auri."

Auri cried into his chest as she hiccupped her words out. "You're my best friend, and you wouldn't talk to me."

Dae closed his eyes as he realized he'd never be more than that to her. "I promise I'll never shut you out again."

Auri's sobs slowly stopped as she regained control of her emotions. Dae kept his arm around her and led her to the sofa. "I shouldn't have told you how I felt."

"I'm glad you did." Auri grabbed a tissue from the box on the side table and wiped her eyes. "Dae, I love you."

"I know you do." Dae kissed her gently on her forehead. "And I'm happy to settle for your friendship."

"I don't want you to settle for my friendship." Auri knew that she had to tell Dae how she really felt about him. "Please just listen to me. On the night you told me how you felt about me, I went home and spent most of the night sitting up thinking about us. I realized then that something Draco told me was true. He said he couldn't compete with you. He was right." Auri swallowed. "No-one could, which is why my relationships failed. It wasn't because of me, it was because of you. I think I fell for you when I was trying to find a cure for you."

Dae couldn't quite believe what he was hearing. "I was a babbling mindless fool, Auri."

"It didn't matter." Auri knew how pathetic she seemed. "I admit, I was first driven by guilt over what had happened to you but I still didn't see that I'd grown to care about you so much; not even when Dad told me about him and Anna. All I knew was that I was angry on your behalf."

Dae could see she was being earnest. "Auri, you don't have to do this."

"Let me finish speaking." Auri put a shaky hand over Dae's. "I meant what I said about you that night on the Boardwalk. The only thing I'd change about the comment I made was, is that you are perfect for me. Being my friend making you more so."

Dae was stunned. "You can't be in love me."

"I am." Auri ran a deprecating hand down the front of her dress. "Why do you think I look so bloody awful? I've never been as miserable as when you wouldn't talk to me."

Dae felt guilty. "But I'm twenty years older than you."

"I wouldn't care if you were a hundred years older than me." Auri responded vehemently. "I'd still feel the same way about you."

"I don't know what to say." Dae still couldn't bring himself to believe that Auri was telling the truth.

"Tell me you love me." Auri wanted to hear the words.

"I love you." Dae stood up and pulled Auri close to him. "Without you, I'm nothing."

"I love you as well, Dae." Auri gave a little shiver. "Will you make love to me?"

Dae went still at Auri's words. "Are you sure this is what you really want?"

"More than anything else I've ever wanted." Auri told him.

"I can't believe I'm shaking." Dae gave a small laugh. "I'd pick you up but I'm frightened of dropping you."

"I trust you." Auri liked the effect she was having on Dae.

At Auri's words, Dae scooped her up into arms and carried her into the bedroom before kicking the door closed behind him.

January 30th 2012

Dae flooded into Hogwarts, where Remus was waiting for him. "Hi."

"Dae, it's been far too long." Remus led him into the study that had been added to the Headmaster's office. "How are you enjoying your new job?"

"More than I could ever have imagined." Dae knew that Remus wasn't going to like what was coming. "Remus, I've got something to ask you."

"Ask away." Remus wondered why Dae was so nervous.

"I'd like your permission to marry your daughter." Dae watched as shock rippled across Remus' face.

"Auri?" Remus had known that she and Dae were friends but Dae's proposal came as something of a surprise. "I didn't even know you two were dating."

"We've been seeing each for the last two months." Dae informed him.

"Don't you think you're rushing things?" Remus liked Dae but Auri was his daughter.

Dae swallowed hard. "She's pregnant."

"What?" Remus advanced on his friend.

"Auri's six weeks pregnant." Dae held still as Remus loomed over him.

“You got my little girl pregnant after only two weeks?” Remus could feel the wolf in him rising to the surface.

Anna was just making her way up the stairs into Remus’ office, when she heard Remus snarl out. “You son of a bitch.”

Dashing up the stairs and into the study she found Dae backed up against the wall. “Remus what are you doing? The girls are only a few doors down.”

Remus turned, his eyes a vivid angry amber. “I’m about to beat the crap out of him.”

“Let him go.” Anna ordered Remus. “And tell me why.”

Remus responded to his wife. “Fine.” He snarled at Dae. “Tell her.”

“I want to marry Auri.” Dae wondered how Anna would take the news.

Anna’s face lit up. “I’m really pleased for you both.”

“Now tell her why.” Remus strove to hold his temper.

“She’s pregnant.” Dae admitted.

“He bloody well got her pregnant after only two weeks.” Remus walked over to the other side of the room; he didn’t trust himself not to rip Dae apart.

“Remus, Auri’s almost thirty years old.” Anna put a hand on her husband’s back. “You didn’t think she was a virgin, did you?”

“No, but I didn’t think I’d find out she’s got to get married because she’s pregnant.” Remus tamped down his rage.

“I would have wanted to marry Auri even if she wasn’t pregnant.” Dae interrupted the couple. “Remus, I know I’m not exactly the partner you imagined your daughter ending up with but I love her more than I could have ever believed possible and I’d do anything to make her happy. All we want is your blessing.”

Anna slipped arm around Remus' waist. "Remus, please."

"Let me speak to Dae alone again." Remus told Anna. After she'd left, Remus turned to Dae. "I know you must think me some sort of hypocrite given my previous reputation, but Auri's my daughter."

"I understand, Remus." Dae knew that he'd feel the same as Remus if it was Chloe that was being discussed. "I expected you to blow up at me; I'd have done the same if it was my daughter in the same situation. To be honest, I expected you to hit me as soon as I told you. You certainly showed more restraint than I did when you told me about you and Anna."

"My face hurt for almost a week." Remus moved to the drinks cabinet. "That was some punch you gave me."

"You didn't heal it?" Dae took the scotch that Remus poured out for him.

"I felt guilty so I left it." Remus admitted. "You were entirely justified."

"I do love Auri, Remus." Dae sat down. "With her I feel as if I could do anything. I want to spend the rest of my life with her."

"You'd better not hurt her, Dae." Remus threatened. "Otherwise I swear they won't find enough of you to ever work out that you were once human."

Dae knew that Remus wasn't joking. "I'll take good care of her and the baby."

4th February 2020

Auri looked up to find her sister at the door. "Chloe, what's up?"

"Have you got five minutes?" Chloe asked.

"Are you alright?" Auri got up from the desk and walked around it to close the door behind Chloe.

“Not really.” Chloe sat down and then stood back up again. “I think I’m making a big mistake.”

“In marrying Matthias you mean?” Auri hoped that this was what Chloe was talking about.

Chloe nodded her head. “Yes.”

“Do you want to call off the wedding?” Auri crossed her fingers.

“I think so.” Chloe looked embarrassed. “He hit me.”

Auri knew that Remus would kill him. “Chloe, have you told Dad yet?”

Chloe shook her head. “I was afraid of what he’d do.”

“How many times has he done this?” Auri knew that she was going to have to tell Remus or, at least persuade Chloe to do so.

“A few.” Chloe chewed her nail. “I forgave him the first few times but yesterday he really frightened me.”

“We all hoped that living with us for a few years had changed him but it looks as though we were wrong.” Auri had never liked Matthias Malfoy or his sister Fenella. Neither child had been grateful for what Remus and Anna had done for them. Their younger siblings, Sophia and William had been totally different and both doted on Remus, choosing to stay at Grimmauld Square even after they could have moved back into Malfoy Manor.

Remus and Anna had taken the Malfoy children in as Lucius had stated that if he and his wife were unable to take care of the children for any reason, Sirius and Lily were to be their guardians. Under Lily’s will, guardianship of any children under her care fell to Remus which had meant that the goblins had construed it as meaning that Remus would have to take the Malfoys in or they would end up in an orphanage until they were old enough to manage on their own.

“I should have known better but he was so charming and I really fell for him. I’m such an idiot.” Chloe continued to chew her nails. “I was going to talk to Seville as she went through something similar but her assistant said that she was out of the country following up a news lead.”

“You did the right thing in coming to me.” Auri put an arm around the girl. “Let’s go see Dad.”

Chloe was frightened as she and Auri made their way to the apparition point and out to Hogwarts, which now had a central apparition point just out of the Great Hall. Chloe nervously followed Auri up to the Headmaster’s office. Auri knocked and Remus called out. “Come in.”

Remus was already halfway across the room before Auri had barely even opened the door. Ignoring Auri he pulled Chloe into his arms. “What’s wrong? I can smell your fear a mile away.”

Chloe didn’t answer. Remus tipped her chin up. “You can tell me; I won’t judge you.”

“Dad, is there any chance we can get Anna and Dae out of class?” Auri’s serious tone alerted Remus to the fact that whatever was wrong with Chloe it wasn’t good.

“Pasha. French.” Remus called out to the two house-elves who’d moved into Hogwarts with Auri and Dae when Dae had taken up the Defense position six years earlier.

Within ten minutes both Anna and Dae had joined the small group. Auri looked at Chloe. “Go ahead.”

“I can’t.” Chloe started to cry.

“Do you want me to tell them?” Auri put her arm around her sister when she nodded.

Dae and Remus exchanged glances and both resigned themselves to the fact that Auri was about to tell them that was Chloe was pregnant. Anna sensed it was something else. "What is it, Auri?"

"Chloe doesn't want to marry Malfoy anymore." Auri watched relief cross both Dae and Remus' faces. "Before you say anything else, there's something you should know. He hit her."

Within a fraction of a second, Remus was heading towards the fireplace, just as Chloe had predicted he would. Dae whipped out his wand and Remus found himself frozen. Dae undid the spell enough so that Remus could talk. "Remus, don't do this. Malfoy isn't worth going to Azkaban again for."

"I'm going to kill him." Remus snarled, his eyes glowing amber.

Anna, who was furious herself, placed a hand on Remus' face. "Dae's right; the little shit's not worth it."

Remus calmed down under his wife's touch; she was probably one of the few people who could bring about such a swift change in him. "You can release me."

Dae dropped the spell and turned to Chloe. "I think it's time Malfoy had a visit from the Aurors."

Chloe was frightened that Malfoy would go after her. "He'll know it was because of me."

Dae told her. "He can't hurt you as he's never going near you again. If he does I'll let Remus kill him, or better still I'll do it myself."

Chloe sagged a little against Auri. "I didn't know what to do, Dae."

"You did the right thing." Dae reassured her. "Leave it to us now."

Auri kissed Dae. "I'll take Chloe down to our apartment; I'm sure Willow and the others will be happy to see her."

Chloe knew that her half-siblings would be delighted to see her. "I can find my own way." She hugged Auri. "Thanks; I've been so worried."

"Off you go." Auri waited for Chloe to leave the room. "So who wants to go to the States to tell the head of the Auror Division that we've got a job for him?"

"That would be me." Remus stood up and kissed Anna. "I should be back by tomorrow morning at the latest. Chloe is to stay here until then."

Anna watched Remus disappear into their sitting room to get together a few things. "Thanks for taking care of Chloe for me."

"She's my sister; what else am I'm going to do." Auri let out a sigh. "Sometimes I find our convoluted family a little hard to keep track of."

"I know what you mean." Anna checked the time. "I'm just going to dismiss my class; after that news I'm not really in the mood for teaching history."

"Me neither." Dae grinned. "I mean teaching Defense, not history."

"I know what you meant." Anna smiled back. "Let's go dismiss the rabble and come back here."

Auri watched them go. Remus came back into the room. "I'll see you tomorrow, Auri."

"Take care, Dad." Auri kissed Remus on the cheek before he flooded out.

The final chapter continues from where this one left off before dealing with the aftermath of the Ministry attack.

Chapter 77: Harry

Like the last chapter, it's pretty long. After posting it a few days ago, I've listened to what reviewers have said and I've accordingly made some changes to the final third of this story (June 24th 2006 onwards).

There's a nod to the series House and Buffy TVS, as well as a teeny one to ST:TNG in this chapter.

4th February 2020

Remus landed with his international portkey at the wizarding section of Los Angeles airport before clearing customs and then heading for the apparition point. Apparating directly into the hotel he needed, Remus made his way up to the room without checking in at the desk, and knocked on the door.

The occupant of the hotel room was stunned to see Remus standing there. "Dad, what are you doing here?"

"I need your help." Remus went into the hotel room and explained what had happened to Chloe.

"Excuse me for a minute." His son went into the bathroom and quickly explained what had happened to his wife, who was taking a bath, before rejoining Remus. "I'll be on an international portkey out tomorrow morning. In the meantime, let's go down to the bar."

"I knew I could count on you." Remus smiled as the pair let themselves out of the room.

Two Days Later

Matthias put down the newspaper he was reading as his butler knocked and entered the room. Matthias hated house-elves. "What is it?"

Fillongley bowed slightly. "There's a gentleman in the drawing room who wishes to see you, Sir."

“Who is it?” Matthias snapped.

“He said he preferred not to give his name, Sir.” Fillongley answered.

“Tell him he can get out then.” Matthias went back to his paper as Fillongley left the room.

Moments later the door opened again, and Matthias didn’t bother looking up. “Now what?”

“I think it’s terribly rude to leave a guest waiting, Malfoy, don’t you?” Matthias’ visitor had had enough of waiting.

Matthias went pale. “What are you doing here?”

“You really think you can hit my sister and get away with it, Malfoy?” Harry grabbed the man by the throat, and pulled him out of his chair before backing him against the damask covered wall. “You should have known better.”

“You’re head of Auror Division; you can’t do this.” Matthias knew that Harry was more than capable of ripping him to shreds.

“I can pretty much do whatever I want.” Harry told him. “Including filing a report saying that you were injured when you resisted arrest.”

“Arrest for what?” Matthias was struggling a little to breathe.

“Fillongley must have forgotten to tell you. I’ve got a warrant to search your home for Dark artifacts, Malfoy.” Harry loosened his grip slightly; he didn’t want to break Matthias’ neck accidentally.

The door opened again, and Orion entered the room. “Sir, we’ve found a room under the library floor; it’s full of Class A Banned Goods and Substances.” Fillongley, tired of Matthias’ treatment of him, had been only too happy to co-operate with the team of Aurors that Orion was head of.

"I might have known you'd be with him." Matthias scowled at his brother-in-law.

"Well as he's my number one, it's pretty much a given that where I go, he goes and..." Harry let go of Matthias and punched him in the ribs before breaking his nose on his knee as Matthias collapsed to the floor in pain. "...it helps to have a witness to back me up when I file the report about you resisting arrest." Harry walked away. "Oblivate."

Harry then altered Malfoy's memory, before turning to Orion. "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have involved you in this, particularly as he's supposed to be family."

"Just because I married Sophia, it doesn't mean that he's family. Chloe on the other hand is." Orion knew that Sophia and her younger brother, Will, would agree with him; they and their two elder siblings didn't exactly see eye to eye. "Let's get him cuffed and out of here."

"Good idea." Harry slid on the cuff that would suppress Malfoy's magic and the three disappeared, leaving the remainder of Orion's team to catalogue their finds.

After filing a report that Orion willingly corroborated, Harry headed for Hogwarts to see Chloe. He found her sitting with his daughter.

"Daddy." Harry's youngest, Willow, threw herself at Harry.

Harry caught his daughter as she leapt into the air. "Hi small stuff."

"I'm almost as tall as Tara now." At seven and being the youngest, Willow constantly felt as if she had something to prove.

"I can see that." Harry kissed his daughter. "How about you go find Grandpa Remus?"

"You want me out, don't you?" Willow was used to Harry talking business by now.

"I do, sweetheart." Harry watched as Willow opened and closed the door, before he turned to Chloe. "Why didn't you tell me what that bastard had done to you sooner?"

"Because I was afraid of what you'd do to him. The same with the Dad." Chloe admitted. "What did you do to him?"

"He's been arrested for possession of Class A Goods and Substances." Harry didn't tell her he'd injured Malfoy. "And before you ask, no, I didn't set him up."

Even so, Chloe felt guilty. "But he'll go to Azkaban."

"Chloe, he bloody well lived with for us two years; he should have known better than to fuck with one of our family." Harry watched Chloe wince at his language. "Sorry, I shouldn't be swearing in front of you."

"It's okay." Chloe let out a breath. "How long is he going away for?"

"With good behavior, I'd say at least ten, maybe even fifteen years." Harry watched relief color his sister's face. "Chloe, if anyone ever touches you again, please tell me or Dad next time."

"I felt too embarrassed." Chloe rubbed her nose, something she always did when she was uncomfortable. "I'm almost as strong as you are because of Mum but I still didn't defend myself."

"Why not?" Harry led Chloe to sit down.

"I don't know." Chloe sighed. "That's a lie. I was afraid he'd finish with me if I did. But the last time, I was actually frightened of him."

Harry sighed. "No man is worth that. I'd never raise a hand to my wife."

Chloe smirked at him. "That's because she'd kill you, Harry."

"And don't I know it." Harry stood up. "Do you want to file a report against him?"

“Do you think I should?” Chloe had thought about it.

“To be honest, the more we can throw at him, the longer he’s going to be in Azkaban.” Harry hoped that Chloe would say yes, more for her own peace of mind, than for anything else.

“Okay.” Chloe stood up. “But can we do it now?”

“Come on.” Harry led Chloe out to the apparition point. “Hold on to me. I’ll apparate us directly to my office.”

Chloe took her brother’s arm and braced herself; she’d hated apparating as much as Harry hated flooing. “Thank goodness, that’s over.”

“Sit down.” Harry then took down the details of when Malfoy had assaulted her. “We just need to record your statement onto an orb for evidence. Come along.”

Chloe followed Harry up the corridor and into a room with twelve doors. “I hate this place.”

“You get used to it.” Harry had felt the same way when he’d first started working for the Ministry. “We’re going into the records room.”

Chloe recorded her statement onto an orb and it was stored for use, if necessary, when Malfoy went on trial. She then followed Harry out and looked round. “It’s hard to believe that Voldemort was ever in here.”

“Do you want to see the room?” Harry knew that Chloe had never seen the Death Chamber.

“Are we allowed to?” Chloe asked, even as she followed Harry towards the door.

Harry nodded. “I am. Hold onto me.”

Chloe did as he asked but still gave a small squeal as they were sucked into the room when Harry opened the door. "I didn't expect that."

"It's a bit of a shock isn't it?" Harry turned to face the archway and veil. "That's it."

Chloe didn't go any nearer than she was. "It's kind of creepy."

Harry climbed down the large stone benches and clambered up onto the dais. "We still don't really know where it goes to."

Chloe began to get nervous as Harry walked around the archway. "Harry, please come away from that thing."

Harry could sense that Chloe was getting upset and jumped down before walking back over to her. "Sorry; I didn't mean to upset you."

"It's just I've seen Aunt Narcissa's memory of the entire event, and it frightens me to think how close we came to losing you." Chloe backed towards the door. "Can we go, please?"

"Of course." Harry opened the door and took a last glimpse at the veil. "I can't say it's my favorite place either." He gave a small shiver as he remembered exactly how close his alternate had come to killing him.

1st May 1998

As she watched Harry smash into Voldemort and begin to enter the archway, Narcissa swiftly turned her attention to saving him. Not wanting to take a chance that she'd lose him if she used only Harry Lupin or Harry Potter as his name, she opted for using Harry's full name. "Accio Harry Remus Lupin-Potter."

Harry had resigned himself to dying when he felt a tug backwards as Narcissa battled with whatever was beyond the veil that had begun to drag him forwards. Unbeknown to Harry, Severus had noticed what Narcissa was trying to do, and had turned his wand on Harry as well, copying Narcissa's incantation. "Accio Harry Remus Lupin-Potter."

At Severus' spell, Harry suddenly discovered that he knew what it felt like to be in a tug of war. Even though he couldn't move his head, Harry could feel Voldemort's arm holding tightly around his neck. Harry had a feeling that Voldemort wasn't going to be letting go anytime soon, and the force behind the veil was still continuing to tug him slowly forward in spite of Narcissa and Severus battling to drag him out.

Unexpectedly Harry felt a pair of arms go around his waist before letting go again. After picking himself up off the floor, Orion had also seen what was happening and had hurriedly wrapped his arms around Harry's waist. However, as Harry's front half was already inside the archway, the lower portion of Orion's arms also disappeared beyond the veil, and Orion had felt as if someone was trying to rip them out of their sockets, forcing him to let go. "Hold on Harry."

Harry wondered what Orion was going to do. Turning around to try and find a wand, and ducking as a stray spell headed his way, Orion spotted the ebony knife that Aditi had dropped. Picking it up, he ran back towards the veil before taking a deep breath and bringing it down across Voldemort's arm. The knife sliced through it as easily as if it had been butter and suddenly Harry found himself hurtling backwards as Voldemort's body was no longer dragging him into the veil.

Severus cast his second spell as Harry shot through the air like a cork from a bottle. "Arresto Momentum."

The spell had scant time to work, and Harry smashed into both Severus and Narcissa, knocking them to the floor. After rolling to his feet, Harry grimaced at the sight of Voldemort's severed arm which was now lying a short distance away from him. "I think that can follow the rest of him."

Severus banished the arm towards the veil and the three of them watched as it disappeared into the archway. Orion had ducked to avoid the arm before rolling to land at Harry's feet. "Hi, Harry."

Harry gave the boy a quick smile, and pulled him up. "Thanks, Orion. I owe you."

The fighting had begun to die down around them, and Harry could see that several people had managed to get shots in at Remus although no-one had managed to kill him yet. Harry stuck two fingers into his mouth and whistled as loudly as he could. Everyone stopped, even Remus, at the sound. "Everyone out now or you can stay and play with the werewolf."

Harry noticed that most of the Death Eaters had been subdued except for a group on the far side of the veil who were using the steps of the dais to protect themselves. Harry had a feeling that Abbott was in the group as he'd heard a girl scream out from that direction as he'd used Jamie as a human shield.

As people began hurrying out of the room, Harry heard a snarl and realized that Remus had finished dealing with his latest victim. Harry aimed his wand at Remus and pushed all the power he could through it. "Petrificus Totalus Maximus Lupus." Remus came to a halt. Harry turned to Scrimgeour. "That spell won't hold forever. Anyone who tries to kill the werewolf will answer to me."

Harry then turned to call out to the Death Eaters behind the steps who, while not openly firing on them, weren't coming out either. "I'm going to give you two minutes to surrender. If you don't come out, I'm going to release him and let him finish you off."

Harry turned to Scrimgeour. "Why haven't they simply apparated out?"

"No-one with a Dark Mark can." Nic had made sure of that when he'd finally managed to override Voldemort's wards.

Harry then turned to Nic. "I want any magic in this room nullified if they don't come out. Can you do it?"

"I can." Nic turned to leave, only for Scrimgeour to grab his arm. "You can't do that. It'll tear them to pieces."

"They should have thought about that before they joined Voldemort." Harry snapped. "I've given them a choice; they can come out or die."

"Harry's right, Rufus." Nic wasn't feeling particularly charitable after Leo's death. "I suggest you both get out."

Harry followed Scrimgeour to the door before calling out one final time. "This is your last chance. I'd say you've got about twenty seconds. After that you're on your own." Harry saw a wand go up and aim at Remus. Harry didn't hesitate. "Avada Kedavra."

The Death Eater, who'd moved into the open fell to the floor just as Remus was released. Harry turned to Scrimgeour. "I think you'd better shut the door."

Rufus hurriedly closed it, and Harry held out his wand and sealed it. Scrimgeour wasn't happy with Harry or Nic. "The werewolf will rip them apart if they can't defend themselves."

"Ask me if I care." Harry sank to the ground.

Scrimgeour knew that he'd have to take Harry in. "You'll have to come with me." He looked at Nic. "So you will you."

"I'm going nowhere." Nic whispered something in Scrimgeour's ear, who sighed. "Very well but I'm still going to have to take Harry in."

Harry handed over his wand. "Whatever; I give you my word that I'll do whatever you want. But I'm not leaving until I found out whether Remus is still alive."

Believing Remus dead, Scrimgeour was shocked to find out who the werewolf was, and he turned to his men. "Leave him be for the moment. You can take him in when things have calmed down."

Narcissa sat down by Harry as Scrimgeour walked off. "They're going to take you to Azkaban."

"I know that." Harry remembered how awful his Sirius had looked after spending time in the infamous prison. "You need to make the

spell holding me here permanent until I get out or die. Harry doesn't deserve to go through being taken there for something I've done."

Narcissa waited until most of the Aurors had moved away before turning her wand on Harry. "Claudo Ego Harry Potter."

Harry squeezed Narcissa's hand. "Thank you."

Harry sat and listened to the screams of those he'd left to die in the room. He knew that Remus wouldn't be giving them any leeway and he didn't want him to. He wanted them to pay for what they'd done both in his timeline and in this one.

Eventually silence reigned.

3rd May 1998

Harry looked incredulously at Fudge. "So in exchange for my freedom you want me to let the world think that Potter was a good guy?"

"Of course he was." Fudge blustered. "I saw him let you use his wand to battle You Know Who."

"For crying out loud, call him Voldemort. He's dead. Gone. Finished. Never coming back." Harry scowled at Fudge. "And Potter only let me use his wand because Voldemort ordered him to."

"Come, come, Lupin. Jamie Potter was obviously only playing along with You-Know-Who." Fudge didn't meet Harry's eyes as he spoke.

"Are you really so fucking stupid?" Harry could feel his temper rising. "He was a Death Eater. You heard him admit to being Carus. Carus was Voldemort's apprentice."

"I also saw him try to save Lady Black." Fudge pointed out. "If he'd been as bad as you're trying to make out, he'd never have done that."

Harry was almost beyond speechless. "He did no such thing, and you know it. He was ready to stand by and let her die. Why not just admit to the world what he really was, Fudge?"

“Because even though You Know Who is now dead, the world still needs a hero.” Fudge looked disparagingly at Harry. “And even though it was you who killed Voldemort, you’re not the right person for the job.”

“Is it because I left those people to die or is it because I’m a werewolf?” Harry watched Fudge wince when Harry said the word ‘werewolf’.

“Both.” Fudge admitted. “And you’re right. I did hear Potter admit to serving You-Know-Who but it would be too devastating for the wizarding world to find that out.”

“What you really mean is that it would be too destructive to your career, isn’t it?” Harry knew that Fudge’s job wouldn’t hold up to the bad press if the truth about Jamie came out.

Fudge knew that Harry was right. “You know very well it would ruin my career. So, do we have an agreement?”

Harry had had enough. “Print whatever you want; I really don’t give a shit.”

“I need your word that you won’t disparage Rita’s report of the story.” Fudge didn’t want Harry messing things up when he was released.

Harry frowned “Skeeter’s writing the article?”

“Yes. She’s the Prophet’s best reporter.” Fudge had been paid a tidy sum to allow her to write it. “Why, is it a problem?”

“No.” Harry turned his back on Fudge. “Now get out.”

“I haven’t quite finished yet.” Fudge needed Harry’s word before he left.

“What else could you possibly want?” Harry sat down on the concrete slab that masqueraded as a bed in his cell.

“Until you agree to give me your word that you’ll go along with the story, I won’t be signing the pardon allowing you to go free.” Fudge had been pressured by Rufus Scrimgeour as well as Nicolas Flamel to offer Harry a pardon.

“I wasn’t the only person there, Fudge.” Harry pointed out. “Even if I agree, what about everyone else?”

“Everyone else has agreed to go along with the story.” Fudge had used Harry as leverage to get them to agree.

“And what about Remus?” Harry knew that Remus was in a cell several doors down from him.

Fudge shook his head. “He killed innocent people.”

Harry laughed bitterly. “Innocent? They were fucking Death Eaters that I made sure didn’t leave that room. He had nothing to do with it.”

Fudge refused to budge. “I’m sorry but someone’s got to pay for it. There was a huge public outcry when people found out that a werewolf had been involved. Lupin will be spending the rest of his life here.”

“Then good luck with that story.” Harry looked out through the cell bars; the rain that was pouring down outside, spraying his face. “And I can guarantee if you don’t release both of us, then the truth of what happened will find a way into the papers, including the fact that I’m the Boy Who Lived, and not Potter.”

“And exactly how do you expect to do that?” Fudge knew that as Harry had no way of contacting the outside world, he held all the cards.

“Open your briefcase.” Harry told him.

Fudge tentatively opened the briefcase and a small bat flew out and through the bars of the window. “How did you know?”

Harry couldn't believe Fudge was so stupid; he'd just reminded him of what he was. "I've got an excellent sense of smell." Harry grinned. "The bat that is hovering just outside of this window has heard everything we've discussed. I'm sure he'll be more than delighted to offer a transcript of your attempted bribery to the Wizengamot."

"But what you're doing is bribery as well." Fudge pointed out.

"I know, but unlike you I have nothing to lose." Harry leant back against the damp, cold cell wall and put his arms behind his head. "So what's it to be, Fudge?"

3rd June 1998

Harry knew that Fudge had deliberately delayed their release because of what he'd done, but he didn't care. They were finally out of Azkaban and now he and Remus sat in the boat that was taking them to freedom. Because of the Dementors that had once more been roped into guarding the prison, and not having an Animagus form, Remus had been badly affected by them. Therefore it was a much thinner and tired looking Remus than the Remus who'd been taken to Azkaban, who now sat sniffing the sea air. "I didn't expect to see daylight again except through the bars of my window."

"Well, we've got Severus to thank for our freedom." Harry didn't know how Severus had done it. "That and the fact that my sense of smell is a lot better now." Harry shook his head. "I can't believe Fudge didn't check his briefcase before coming onto the island."

Something about Harry's comment sparked a memory in Remus' mind, and he was silent for a moment before smiling. "I think I've just figured out how Pettigrew escaped from Azkaban."

Harry latched on to what Remus was insinuating. "You think he escaped in Fudge's briefcase?"

"He was here when Pettigrew escaped. What are you willing to bet that he had that briefcase with him when he went to see Pettigrew?" Remus just knew he had to be right. "Even though we'll never really know, I can't see a better way." Remus then changed the subject. "So

as I smelt another werewolf in there and I know it was you, what happened after Voldemort left the room?"

"Before I tell you, I should tell you that I'm not your Harry." Harry then explained to Remus what had happened after he'd transformed.

"How are Dudley and Lily?" Remus gripped the seat tightly.

"I don't know. Fudge wouldn't tell me anything." Harry had hoped that Severus would return to his cell, but hadn't been entirely surprised when he hadn't. Harry presumed that Fudge had had anti-animagus wards erected outside of the prison. He was just thankful that Fudge hadn't had the intelligence to erect them inside, as much to his surprise, despite being a werewolf, Harry had still been able to transform. "I'll suppose we'll find out who survived when we get back."

Remus was almost beside himself as he waited for the boat to make landfall. When they arrived, they found Narcissa and Craig waiting for them. Remus was off the boat before it had even been tied to the side. "Dudley?"

"Is just fine, Remus." Craig didn't know though how fine Dudley would be after he gave Remus the news about him and Luna.

"Lily?" Remus could feel his heart pounding as he asked.

"I'm so sorry, Remus." Narcissa put her arm around Remus. "Fawkes tried to save her but the knife was magical and it had pierced her heart. It killed her instantly."

Remus dropped to his knees and covered his face with his hands. "No."

Harry put a hand on Remus' shoulder, and turned to Narcissa and Craig. "Hold on to me."

The couple did as they were asked as Harry activated the Potter family ring. "Heart's Messenger."

Potter Estate

Remus didn't even bother moving when they arrived. Harry called out. "Pasha."

The small sad looking house-elf appeared. "Mister Harry, sir."

Harry noticed that she didn't call him Master. "Can you please take Remus to his room?"

Pasha vanished with Remus. Craig patted Harry on his shoulder before heading upstairs to check Remus over for any physical injuries.

Luna walked over to Harry. "I still owe you for what you did to me."

"Be my guest." Harry turned his cheek towards her, expecting Luna to slap him.

Instead she planted a kiss on his cheek. "Thank you for not making Harry having to suffer Azkaban."

"I doubt he'd have ended up there." Harry told her.

"I disagree." Severus stepped out of the drawing room. "Fudge was looking for a scapegoat and you and Remus were most definitely it."

"Thank you." Harry walked over and shook Severus' hand. "I don't know how you did it, but thank you."

"You've actually got Kingsley Shacklebolt to thank. Kingsley is the new head of the Auror Department now that Scrimgeour's the new Deputy Undersecretary. Kingsley had a meeting with Fudge just before he left to see you, and slipped me into the briefcase when Fudge nipped out." Severus knew he would treasure the look on Fudge's face when he'd opened the briefcase forever.

"Considering he thought he was dying, Kingsley made a quick recovery didn't he?" Harry remembered how he'd looked the last time he'd seen him.

“He was back in the office the very next day. I admit he was battered and bruised but he said he had a job to do.” Severus had stepped into help at the Ministry, as had many other people.

“What about the others?” Harry sat down. “Who else did we lose apart from Lily, Charlie and Tula?”

“Fred Weasley didn’t make it.” Severus hated that he’d been right about the young man’s chances. “Neither did his fiancée.”

“Shit.” Harry knew that there had to have been others. “Anyone else?”

“Two of George’s team were killed in the Death Chamber, Herbert Radley and Jeremy Baxter.” Severus closed his eyes as he recalled identifying their bodies. “The Auror division lost almost one-third of their men.”

Harry whistled. “That’s a lot of people.”

Severus knew that Kingsley had an uphill battle on his hands. “Out of the major players on Voldemort’s side, both Malfoys survived and are in Azkaban. Unfortunately one of Voldemort’s lieutenants escaped.”

“I know.” Harry rubbed a hand across the back of his neck.

“How?” Severus was surprised.

“I can’t tell you.” Harry wasn’t going to take the chance. “I also believe that there are still quite a few Death Eaters unaccounted for, but I intend to track them down, or at least I’m sure your Harry will. Who else?”

“Abbott was one of the Death Eaters who got left in the room with Remus.” Severus looked at Harry. “But I have a feeling you knew that already.”

“I thought I heard her scream when I disposed of Potter.” Harry climbed to his feet. “Good riddance to bad rubbish.”

“Prewett was with her; she didn’t make it either.” Severus had been horrified at the state of the bodies. Harry never got to see inside the room again; he’d been arrested and removed the moment it had been determined that Remus was still alive.

Harry wonder what had happened to Blaise and Theo. “Blaise and Theo?”

“They’re both fine. Blaise ran into Magnus, one of Voldemort’s Death Eaters.” Severus knew that the man had been lucky to escape from Villa Laurifer at all. “Magnus had been about to kill Blaise when Theo came up behind them and stunned Magnus. He’s now in Azkaban as well.”

“It could have been so much worse.” Harry still wasn’t happy to have lost so many people. “How is everyone here holding up?” Harry knew that it wasn’t going to be a happy household.

“Hogwarts finished early and Anna’s moved into Grimmauld Square. She’s got her hands full at the moment with the Malfoy children as well as...” Narcissa started to explain.

“The Malfoys?” Harry wondered what had gone on in his absence.

“Sirius and Lily were listed as their guardians in case something happened to Lucius and Petra. They didn’t provide any other guardians, so because Sirius and Lily are both gone now, guardianship of the children falls under Lily’s will which means that Remus and his wife get custody.”

Harry whistled. “Anna must be pulling her hair out.”

“A little but with Petra Malfoy’s parents both also in Azkaban, there’s no other family members to take care of them except for Pansy and she’s already said that she couldn’t cope.” Narcissa explained.

“Where is Pansy now?” Harry knew that she’d been on Theo’s team.

“Guess.” Severus couldn’t resist teasing Harry.

“Why don’t we just open up an orphanage?” Harry couldn’t believe that Anna had opened up the house to all of the children.

“That’s not all, as well as Lily’s kids and the Malfoys, there’s Seville and Robert as well.” Narcissa finished listing the expanded family that had moved into Grimmauld Square.

“Robert?” Harry was surprised to find that Bella’s son was staying there.

“I offered to take him but Seville won’t hear of it.” Narcissa knew that the girl had fallen in love with the little boy. “She’s going to adopt him.”

“But she’s still in bloody school.” Harry pointed out. “And he’s Lestranger’s kid.”

“It doesn’t matter; she loves him and won’t hear anything bad about him.” Severus put a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “It doesn’t matter who his father or his mother is. I should know that.”

Harry knew Severus was talking about Hermione. “How is Hermione?”

“Comfortable but no change.” Severus and Virginie together with his children usually took turns to sit with her.

Harry let out a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness. I wouldn’t want to have to explain to your Harry if something had happened to her.”

Narcissa smiled at Harry. “I feel awful saying this, but speaking of our Harry we’d like him back.”

“Will you ever let me out again?” Harry had to admit to feeling a little panicky at the thought of never being allowed to return.

“I don’t know.” Narcissa admitted. “We need to speak to our Harry first.” She knew that Harry was going to be exceedingly angry with her.

“That’s fair enough. I did hijack his body without his permission.” Harry ran his hand through his hair.

“Peri is waiting for us at Grimmauld Square.” Narcissa held out her arm to Harry. “Would you like to side apparate us?”

Harry did that and found Peri in the drawing room with Anna who ran across the room and drew him into a hug. “Harry, thank goodness.”

Harry was surprised at Anna’s welcome. “You do know I’m not your Harry, don’t you?”

“Yes.” Anna kissed him on the forehead before letting him go. “But you need love and affection as much as my Harry does.”

After Azkaban, Harry was grateful for the comfort. “Then thank you.”

Peri turned to him. “I know this seems unfair after everything you’ve done for us but we really need to speak to Harry.”

“It’s what we agreed.” Harry closed his eyes. “Go ahead.”

Narcissa aimed her wand at Harry. “Finite Incantatum Ego Harry Potter.”

Harry crumpled to the floor. Narcissa took a deep breath. “Enervate.”

Harry moaned before sitting up and scowling at Narcissa and Peri. “Get out of my house.”

Anna put a hand on Narcissa’s arm to stop her leaving. “Harry, they only did what they thought was best.”

Harry climbed to his feet, his face closed and angry. “What was best? My mother is fucking dead because of them.”

“Harry, honey.” Harry turned at the sound of Nia’s voice and he burst into tears. “Mum.”

“Come here.” Nia held out her arms as Harry ran into them. She looked at Narcissa. “Right now, I suggest you get out.”

Nia led Harry away from everyone and into the sitting room. “I’m here, Harry.”

Harry looked at Nia. “It’s their fault Maman is dead.”

“No, Harry it’s not.” Nia knew that Harry wouldn’t like her answer, but she’d seen Narcissa’s memory of what happened. “Lily knew the chance she was taking when she went into the Ministry; you all did. That’s why I refused to let Auri and Georgie go.”

“I’m glad you didn’t.” Harry wiped his face as the tears continued to stream down his cheek. “Mum, why didn’t they trust me?”

“Could you have killed Jamie?” Nia knew that Harry would answer her honestly.

Harry shook his head. “No.”

“Then what they did was the right thing.” Nia held up her hand as Harry began to say something. “Jamie wasn’t the person everyone had once thought he was.”

“Potter didn’t have to kill him though.” Harry was able to access the other Harry’s memories as easily as his alternate had been able to access Harry’s own.

“I believe he did.” Nia knew that Lily would have been heartbroken about it if she’d survived but she believed her sister would have agreed with her. “Jamie wouldn’t have hesitated to try and kill you if it was the other way around; in fact he tried, didn’t he?”

Harry nodded. “But...”

Nia interrupted him. “Harry, it really doesn’t matter now whether what the other Harry did could have been prevented. It’s done and gone. If Jamie had survived, he’d either be in prison right now, or Fudge...” Here Nia frowned at the thought of the obnoxious man. “...would

have talked himself into believing that Jamie had been innocent of what we all know he was so very guilty of. He'd be walking the streets, Harry, and no-one you love and care about would be safe."

Harry knew that what his Mum was saying was true. "I just want to go to sleep and wake up to find that this has all been a bad dream."

"So do I, Harry." Nia kissed his head, before bringing up Hermione. "Harry, why didn't you tell me about Hermione?" Nia had been shocked to find out that not only was Harry married but he was married to the poor girl who was now lying in the wizarding version of a Muggle coma.

"We couldn't risk it; I'm sorry." Harry felt a little guilty about not telling Nia. "Mum, I've got to find some way to help her."

"Everyone's doing everything they can still." Nia stroked Harry's hair. "Auri is swearing she'll find a cure for both you and Dae."

"Dae?" Harry didn't know about him.

"He's still alive, Harry." Nia watched Harry begin to smile before she dashed the one piece of good news he'd received so far. "But unfortunately Bellatrix Lestrange tortured him until he lost his mind."

Harry felt sorry for Anna. "Isn't there anything anyone can do?"

"No." Nia sighed. "But Auri refuses to believe that. She's blaming herself for what happened to him."

"It wasn't her fault." Harry protested. "She didn't tell Lestrange to torture him."

"She's sworn an oath to become a healer and to try and find a cure for him." Nia hardly recognized the determined young girl Auri had turned into almost overnight. "Even though I keep telling her to stop, she spends all of her spare time pouring over books." Nia tilted Harry's head so that he was looking at her. "You do know that like Auri and Dae, it's not Narcissa and the others' faults what happened to your mother, don't you?"

Harry tried to look away but his mum was holding his chin too tightly, and Harry didn't want to hurt her by trying to get away from her. "Things might have gone differently if they hadn't brought the other Harry through."

Nia disagreed. "I think I would have lost you, if they hadn't, Harry. Can you honestly tell me that you would have dealt with the situation any differently or more effectively?"

Harry closed his eyes before shaking his head. "But Maman's still gone and it hurts so badly."

"I know, sweetheart." Nia had gone through hundreds of scenarios in her mind of what could have happened after she'd learnt about Lily's death. "The other Harry did everything he could to save Lily."

Harry swallowed hard. "I know."

Nia was glad that Harry was finally acknowledging the fact that things had gone as well as they could have. "Harry, Luna told me that Remus bit you."

"It wasn't his fault, Mum." Harry defended his Dad.

"I know that, Harry." Nia stroked Harry's hair out of his face. "What you did was a very brave thing."

Harry knew he'd done what he thought anyone else would have. "At least I didn't have to go through the first transformation; the other Harry went through it for me."

Nia knew she would be eternally grateful to him for that. "Severus said that he will be brewing Wolfsbane for you."

Harry was aware that Severus would do everything he could to make the transformation easier for him. "I guessed as much."

Nia could feel Harry trembling as she held him. "I'll take care of you."

Harry leant into his Mum's embrace. "Mum, I feel so lost right now."

"I know Harry." Nia held Harry as he started to cry again. "But I'm here, sweetheart."

Outside the room, Anna made sure that no-one disturbed them. Narcissa and Peri had returned to the Potter Estate.

Two Days Later

Harry faced Peri. "I'm still angry about what you all did but I do understand."

Peri let out the breath she'd been holding. "We really did think it was the right thing to do."

Harry thought that Peri looked terrible. He walked over to her and pulled her into a hug. "I'm so sorry about Leo and Dae."

Peri bit back the tears that always seemed close to the surface. "Thank you, Harry, and I'm sorry about Lily."

"Thank you." Harry didn't let Peri go as the two took comfort from each other.

Peri eventually coughed and released Harry. "I need to talk to you about the other Harry."

Harry suddenly felt nervous. "What about him?"

"At the moment, there's still always the chance that he could come through to the forefront." Peri began. "But there is a way to prevent it."

"Then please do it." While Harry was grateful that his counterpart had saved him from a painful first transformation as well as from having to experience Azkaban firsthand, he still didn't want him coming through again.

"It's not that simple." Peri patted the space on the sofa next to her as she sat down. "Harry, the only way to stop him from coming forward

is to complete the ritual that should have taken place when he arrived here.”

“You mean merge us?” Harry felt his stomach go over at the thought of it.

Peri nodded. “You’d still be you, but you’d also be a little like him.”

“I don’t know.” Harry started pacing the floor. “Why can’t you just use the same spell on me you used on him to lock him in place.”

“It only worked on the other Harry because he wasn’t the dominant personality; you are.” Peri put her arm around Harry. “I want you to think about it; because once it’s done it can’t be undone.”

Harry knew that it wouldn’t be an easy decision.

Two weeks later

Harry closed his eyes. “Go ahead.”

Peri brought the other Harry forward. Harry opened one eye. “I’m surprised to be here.”

“You can thank Harry and his morals.” Peri told him. “He wanted you to have the chance to know what was going to happen.”

Harry frowned. “And what is going to happen?”

“He’s going to allow me to complete the merging that should have taken place years ago.” Peri informed him.

“So this is goodbye then, isn’t it?” Harry looked at Peri. “You used the Fidelius on the talk you had with Harry about it, didn’t you?”

Peri nodded. “Harry didn’t want you to know everything we discussed, and I agreed with him.”

Harry stood up. “Is there any chance I can say goodbye to Luna?”

“She thought you might want to do that.” Peri passed over a note. “She left this for you.” She then left the room.

Harry opened the envelope. There were only two words printed on the blank sheet. “Turn Around.”

Harry span round to find Luna standing in the doorway. “Hello.”

“Hello, Harry.” Luna stepped into the room.

Harry stayed where he was. “You’re not going to let me kiss you this time, are you?”

Luna shook her head. “No, I’m not. I really don’t think Dudley would be very happy about it.”

“There’s something else, isn’t there?” Harry could tell that she had something to tell him.

“When Craig examined me at the hospital, he found out that I was two weeks pregnant.” Luna put a hand on her stomach. “It’s been something of a shock.” Luna blushed. “It was only the first time we’d ever made love.”

“It was because you were going to the Ministry, wasn’t it?” Harry knew how it felt to need that kind of comfort.

Luna nodded. “I needed to feel close to Dudley and he felt the same way.”

Harry felt awful about what he’d done to Luna at the Ministry. “And I put that spell on you. I’m really sorry, Luna. I’d never have done that if I’d known.”

“It’s okay, Harry. Craig said it didn’t hurt the baby.” Luna stepped over to Harry. “And as we didn’t know that I was pregnant, you probably did me a favor when you sent me to the hospital. If I’d stayed, I might have ended up being injured and losing my daughter.”

"You're going to have a little girl?" Harry felt a streak of jealousy go through him. "When is she due?"

"January 12th." Luna placed a hand on her stomach. "I'm going to be staying in Anna's rooms after the baby comes so that I can finish up my schooling, and keep my daughter with me."

"Congratulations." Harry kissed Luna on the cheek. "I hope you'll be happy."

"I know I will." Luna slipped her arms around Harry. "Thank you for everything."

"For you I'd have done anything." Harry kissed the top of her head before letting her go. "You can tell Peri I'm ready now."

Luna smiled at him before leaving the room. Peri came back in. "Luna said that you're ready."

"I am." Harry could feel his heart pounding.

Peri laid a gentle hand on his cheek. "I know you must be scared but Harry, even though you won't be able to come forward again like this, you'll always be a part of our Harry. He'll always carry your memories as well as his own."

Harry moved Peri's hand away from his cheek and kissed her knuckles. "Thank you for telling me that."

"Thank you for being you." Peri kissed his cheek and sat him down. "Now close your eyes."

Trying to quell the panic that was still fighting to make its way to the surface, Harry did as Peri asked. Peri then turned her wand on him. "Convenio Animus Convenio Substantia Convenio Harry Potter Convenio Harry Lupin-Potter Sempiterna."

Harry collapsed back onto the sofa and Peri swung his legs up onto it before covering him up. She knew it would likely be some time before he awoke.

Later that night

Harry opened one eye and yawned. "Mum?"

Nia, who'd sat with him since Peri had told her the ritual had been completed, knelt down in front of him. "Harry, I'm here."

Harry didn't feel any differently. "Did the spell work?"

Peri smiled. "It did, Harry."

"I expected, well, I don't really know what I expected." Harry slid the blanket off his legs. "I think I was frightened that I'd find myself on the inside looking out while the other Harry ran the show."

"As I've already explained to you, you'll have some of the other Harry's characteristics; exactly what yet remains to be seen." Peri told him.

Harry let out a sigh. "I feel bad about him but I'm glad that he can't take over anymore."

"Come and get something to eat." Nia led Harry into the kitchen. "Have you decided yet what you're going to do now?"

"Severus has agreed to let me move into his house." Harry watched as Nia moved about the kitchen fixing him his favorite sandwich.

"You want to be with Hermione, don't you?" Nia passed Harry a glass of orange juice while she continued sorting out his meal.

"More than anything, Mum." Harry took a sip of the orange juice. "I love her."

Nia felt her heart contract at the look on Harry's face. "Just remember that both Grim and I will be around for you. I'm sure once Remus is back on his feet, he'll say the same."

Harry grimaced as he thought about Remus who'd refused to eat since Lily's death. Severus had made the hard decision to withhold Wolfsbane from Remus, knowing that the werewolf would do what Remus was refusing to. During the change the werewolf had, as Severus suspected that it would, consumed as much meat as it had had thrown to it but it had also wreaked a lot of damage on itself.

As hard as it was for Harry losing his birth mother, Harry knew that he wouldn't have wanted to be in Remus' shoes and having to face life alone without the woman he loved.

30th April 2001

"I'm so sorry, Harry, but we've done everything we can." Craig hated giving bad news to anyone, more so to someone he knew.

"But I thought the spell could simply be continually reapplied." Harry was reeling at the news.

Craig looked apologetically at Harry. "So did we, but as I told you when I first examined Hermione, I had no idea of how long we could sustain her for."

Harry coughed to try and clear his throat. "What's gone wrong with the spell?"

"It's deteriorating quicker and quicker every time we apply it." Craig had tried everything he knew of to overcome the spell's decline. "I've contacted healers globally but they've all come to the same conclusion I have."

"How long?" Harry asked quietly.

"A week or two at most." Craig swallowed. "Harry, we can wake her before the end if you want to."

Harry was shocked. "What for? To tell her she's going to die?"

"No, so that you can say goodbye." Craig reached out to try and touch Harry but he pulled back.

"It would be too cruel." Harry stood up and headed towards the door.
"Excuse me."

Craig watched the young man go and felt his heart go out to him. Severus walked in. "How did it go?"

"As badly as I expected it to." Craig admitted.

"Has he made a decision?" Severus had a feeling that Harry wouldn't want to wake Hermione.

"Yes, he said he thinks it would be too cruel to wake her." Craig picked up his jacket. "I'll be by tomorrow to check on Hermione."

Severus shook Craig's hand. "Thank you."

"I'm just sorry I can't do anything more." Craig let go of Severus' hand and walked away.

Severus had a feeling he knew where Harry would be. Heading out to the lake, he found him sitting staring unseeingly across the water.
"Harry."

Harry looked up. "How long have you known?"

"About three months." Severus sat down. "We didn't want to tell you unless we had to."

"There must be something we can do." Harry's voice held a hint of desperation. "You can't tell me that there's nothing in the books in one of our libraries."

"We've searched everyone's library for an answer, even Malfoy's, but there's nothing, Harry." Severus knew that he and Virginie had had time to prepare themselves but for Harry it was a terrible shock.

"Did Craig tell you that he suggested waking Hermione?" Harry couldn't look at Severus.

“He did.” Severus plucked a blade of grass and began playing with it. “What are you going to do?”

“I can’t do that to her, Sev.” Harry answered, feeling numb. “It would be too callous.”

“It’s what I’d want if I was in your position.” Severus hoped he’d be able to help Harry make a decision he wouldn’t later regret.

“Then you’re a selfish bastard.” Harry didn’t soften his words just because Severus was a friend and his father-in-law. “How could you do something like that to Virginie?”

“I meant I’d want to be woken up, Harry.” Severus placed a tentative hand over Harry’s, hoping to provide a little comfort. “I’d hate the idea of not being able to say goodbye to my wife.”

Harry closed his eyes. “What do you think I should do?”

“I don’t know, Harry. I’m not you.” Severus stood up. “But I believe with every fiber of my being that Hermione would want to say goodbye. If you need me, I’ll be back at the house.”

Harry was glad that Severus was astute enough to realize that he wanted to be alone. “I’ll be in later.”

Three Days Later

Harry lay down beside Hermione and pulled her close to him, before aiming his wand at her. “Finite Incantum Vivo Hermione Lupin”.

Hermione groaned. “Harry?”

“Hermione, it’s me.” Harry kissed Hermione, tears rolling down his cheeks.

“Papa?” Hermione’s voice felt odd as if she hadn’t used it in a long time.

“He’s safe, Hermione.” Harry bit back a sob.

"How long have I been like this?" Hermione felt completely disorientated.

"Three years." Harry kissed her again.

Hermione felt weak and immediately knew what was happening. "I'm dying, aren't I?"

"We did everything we could." Harry stroked her hair away from her face. "But we couldn't stop the spell that was keeping you alive from deteriorating anymore."

Hermione placed a hand on Harry's face. "I don't want to leave you."

Harry felt as if his heart was being ripped out of his chest. "Then don't go."

"I'm sorry, Harry." Hermione could feel herself getting weaker. "But I feel so tired."

Harry cradled her, looking into her brown eyes. "Please don't leave me alone, Hermione."

"I'll always love you." Knowing that time had run out for them, Hermione closed her eyes.

"And I'll always love you." Harry began to sob openly as Hermione's hand slipped from his face, and he knew she'd gone.

Several hours later a red-eyed and pale Virginie knocked on the door. Getting no answer, she pushed it open to find that Harry was gone. Hermione was lying on the bed clad in the dress she'd married Harry in, a single red rose clasped between her hands.

June 29th 2001

Harry walked along the lakeside in the gardens of Fable House. Nia had insisted that Harry move in with them when she'd found out that he'd left the Snape Estate, and was living alone at the Potter Estate.

This late at night Harry was surprised to hear sounds drifting towards him. As he heard a laugh and a moan, he realized that a couple was enjoying the lakeside more than he was.

Rounding the corner, he spotted Luna and Dudley at the water's edge, both naked and obviously in the midst of making love. Harry dropped his head and turned away, before changing into his wolf animagus form. He'd surprised everyone that he'd still been able to do it, even after becoming a werewolf.

As he ran through the woods, he tried to block out the sounds of Luna's cries and hurried to get away. Stopping, he stood panting, looking at the new moon, before lifting his head and crying out his anguish to the night.

By the lake, Luna stopped kissing Dudley. "Was that a wolf?"

"It must be Harry." Dudley knew that since Hermione's death, Harry had spent a lot of time in his animagus form. "It's not a full moon so it can't be a werewolf."

Luna shivered at the mournful cry. "I wish we could do something to help him."

"Only time can do that." Dudley looked up at Luna as she sat astride him. "I'm so glad I've still got you. When I lay in that room in the Ministry, all I could think about was how I was going to cope if I lost you." Dudley laid a hand on Luna's rounded belly; their second child, another daughter would be making her appearance in a few months' time. "And we might have lost Emily."

"If Harry hadn't put himself between us and Remus, I think that we might have all died." Luna knew that the only reason Harry was a werewolf now, was because he'd selflessly put the others and Remus first.

Dudley pulled Luna's head back down to his and began to kiss her again, before releasing her. "Why don't we take this inside? I feel a little uncomfortable knowing that Harry's around and we're doing this out here."

"I think that might be a good idea." Luna smiled slightly. "I like making love in the moonlight but as long as I'm with you, I don't care where we do it."

Dudley apparated them both away.

Over the lake, the moon rose higher in the sky serenaded by the heartbroken wolf who cried out its loneliness and pain to it.

December 23rd 2001

Harry knocked back yet another firewhiskey until someone tapped him on the shoulder. "What?"

"You're that Alumno bloke aren't you?"

Harry turned round to find six men standing around him. "And what if I am?"

"I don't know why they let you out of Azkaban so quickly; you deserved to rot with the rest of the Death Eater scum." The man, who'd addressed Harry, moved to stand within a few feet of him.

"I suggest that you back off." Harry poured out some more of the firewhiskey.

"Or what?" The man laughed, his friends joining in.

"Or you're going to regret it." Harry swallowed half of the liquid out of the glass and turned his back on the group.

"Says you and whose army?" A smaller man, buoyed up by his friends' presence, joined in.

"I don't need an army to take you lot on." Harry finished off the firewhiskey.

"I'd like to see you try." Harry's main tormentor stepped back to let Harry get up.

Harry sighed and threw down a handful of galleons onto the bar. "Outside, I don't want to make a mess of this nice man's bar."

The bartender was relieved that Harry was going to take it outside but he wondered how Harry would manage as he'd just seen Harry consume the best part of two bottles of firewhiskey. As he watched the group follow Harry outside, he hurried to his fireplace to call the Aurors.

Once outside, Harry unholstered his wand. "Altogether, or one at a time? It makes no difference to me."

The large man stepped forward. "Come on then, pretty boy."

Harry didn't use his wand and lashed out with his fist, splitting the man's nose sending blood flying everywhere. He then used his foot to kick out, shattering the man's kneecap. Harry smirked as he kicked the man in the chest, sending him crashing to the floor. Harry turned to the others. "So who's next then?"

All five withdrew their wands together. Harry didn't hesitate and dropkicked the largest man, while simultaneously sending a Reducto curse at one of the four remaining men. Ducking out of the way of the spells that began to fly his way, Harry threw up the strengthened shield that Lily had created, before picking the men off one by one. Eventually it was just him and the small man who'd taunted him. "Let's see how big you are now that your friends aren't here to back you up."

The man dropped his wand and backed away from Harry. "Please don't hurt me."

"You should have thought about that earlier." Harry lashed out with his fist and sent the man flying as blood exploded from his mouth.

On his knees, the man spat out several teeth, tears starting to fall down his cheeks. "I'm sorry."

"Tough." Harry aimed his wand at the man. "Crucio."

Two cracks sounded behind Harry and a voice Harry recognized called out to him. "Harry, that's enough."

Harry dropped the spell, and turned round to find Kingsley and Nym Shacklebolt standing there. "I don't think so. He needs to learn that you can't pick on people and not expect to pay the price."

Nym was a little disconcerted to see that Harry's eyes had turned completely black. "Harry, please listen to us."

Harry ignored her and turned back to the man who was cowering in fear. "Are you ready for some more?"

Kingsley sighed and aimed his wand at Harry. "Stupefy. Let's get him to Remus."

Nym cast Mobilicorpus on Harry and took hold of his wrist before apparating them away, leaving Kingsley to clean up.

When Remus carried Harry into the house, Anna shook her head. "I take it he was fighting again."

"He's lucky it was Kingsley who took the call when it came in. He had to obliviate the men Harry had been fighting with. If it had been anyone else who'd found him, he'd have ended up in Azkaban again. He's got a bloody death wish." Remus looked down at his unconscious son. "I'm going to put him in bed."

Anna waited for Remus to come back down. "What are you going to do?"

"He's got too much pent-up aggression. I don't know if it's from becoming a werewolf or because he melded with the other Harry but either way, it's going to stop." Remus was at the end of his tether with Harry. He'd moved into Grimmauld Square after Nia had admitted that she couldn't cope with Harry's drinking, and that she was a little frightened of him being around Kai, Emily and little Katie. Harry had been upset by Nia's admission but had agreed to move in with Remus and Anna.

“Just go easy on him.” Anna was worried about how Remus would handle things. “Remember, you had a tough time after losing Lily.”

“I know but it’s been eight months now since Hermione died.” Remus sighed. “I’ll speak to him tomorrow morning; see if I can’t get him to show a little sense.”

“And if he won’t listen?” Anna could feel her stomach going over.

“Then he’s going to learn the hard way, Anna.” Remus stood up. “I know it’s a bit much to ask but is there any chance you could clear the house of the kids tomorrow? I don’t want them around if this goes as far as I think it might.”

Anna nodded. “Of course. I’m know that Seville and Sophia want to do some last minute shopping. They’ll just be getting an entourage they didn’t expect.”

Remus kissed Anna on the cheek. “Thanks. I’m off to bed. I’ll see you in the morning before you go.”

“Night Rem.” Anna didn’t rush off to her room and stayed where she was. She knew that Remus was right that Harry couldn’t be allowed to continue the way he was but she was also more than aware of how Remus was going to deal with him if he refused to listen. Knowing that she couldn’t interfere, she opened the book she’d started reading a month earlier and tried to lose herself in the story.

The Next Day

Harry groaned and rolled over. “Ouch.” He knew then that he must have drunk more than usual; his metabolism meant he usually didn’t have a hangover. Opening one eye he spotted a hangover potion on the side table and quickly grabbed it before making his way into the bathroom. Once he’d showered and dressed he went downstairs to find Remus waiting for him at the breakfast table.

Harry yawned and looked round. “Where is everyone?”

"In my study now." Remus ignored Harry's question. He'd intended to have it out with Harry there and then but Cassie had felt unwell and was still in the house. He didn't want her interrupting him and Harry in the middle of a full-blown argument. Despite his appalling behavior, Cassie still wouldn't hear a bad word about the brother she adored.

"What for?" With his head still pounding in spite of the hangover potion, Harry wasn't in the mood for one of Remus' lectures. "All you're going to do is talk me to death while I apologize, and we both know I'll do it again."

"Study." Remus snapped.

Harry reluctantly went into his father's study and waited for Remus to follow him in. "So what have I done this time?"

"Do you remember anything from last night?" Remus asked.

Harry frowned as he tried to remember. "I remember asking for a second bottle of firewhiskey; after that it's pretty much a blur."

"You went on a bender Harry, where you proceeded to kick the crap out of six men." Remus stood up. "If it hadn't been for Kingsley intervening, you'd be in Azkaban again, and this time there's no-one else to do the time for you."

"Ask me if I care." Harry could feel his temper rising already. He didn't know why but whenever he was around Remus he constantly felt like hitting out, more so when the full moon was approaching as it was now.

"Well it's time you did care, Harry." Remus kept his back to the door to stop Harry from simply trying to walk out. "You seem to forget that you're a werewolf sometimes. You could have killed those men last night."

"But I obviously didn't, did I? Otherwise we wouldn't be having this conversation and I'd be in Azkaban." Harry wasn't willing to admit that what Remus was saying was true.

"I want your word that you'll stop drinking so heavily." Remus folded his arms and waited for Harry to acquiesce.

"No." Harry refused. "I'm twenty-one, and I can do what I like. You have no right to interfere in my life."

"Harry, normally I wouldn't but you're on a one-way street to Azkaban at the moment." Remus knew that if Kingsley caught him again, he wouldn't give Harry the latitude he had done so far.

"Whatever." Harry went to push by Remus to reach the door.

Remus' hand shot out and he stopped Harry. "You're going nowhere until I'm finished, and right now, I'm not finished."

"As far as I'm concerned, we are." Harry pulled free and stepped around Remus and tried the door, only to find it wouldn't open. "Unlock the door, Dad."

"No." Remus could smell Harry's anger and he knew that it wasn't going to take much to tip him over the edge.

Harry pulled out his wand and tried several unlocking spells, all to no avail. "You can't do this."

"I believe I can." Remus stood with his arms folded.

Harry kicked the door, before turning to face Remus. "Just open the damn door."

"No." Remus told him again.

Harry gave a scream of frustration. "Open the fucking door."

"Make me." Remus knew that Harry had to get his aggression out and he was the best person to deal with it.

"You don't mean that." Harry snarled.

"But I do." Remus told him.

At that moment Harry felt as if hated Remus more than anyone else he knew. "You're going to open the door or I swear you're going to be sorry."

"No." Remus told him for the third time, a smile playing across his lips as Harry kicked the door yet again. "So tell me, Harry, how are you going to make me sorry?"

Harry didn't answer the question and, instead went to apparate out, only to find himself unable to do so. "This is my house."

"You seem to forget that you signed it over to me and my heirs in perpetuity; you may rightfully own it, but I'm master of it." Remus reminded him.

Harry tried to calm down. "Dad, this is ridiculous. Just let me out of the room."

"You're going nowhere until you're ready to discuss your inexcusable behavior in a civilized manner." Remus held out a hand towards a chair.

"I don't want to sit down, and I don't want to talk about my so-called inexcusable behavior." Harry felt as if he was going to explode if Remus didn't let him out.

"Then you'll be staying under this roof until you change your mind." Remus called out. "French."

The small house elf smiled and bowed. "Mister Remus, sir?"

"Please escort Harry to the dueling room. He has a little thinking to do." Remus instructed French.

"I'm not going anywhere." Despite his protestations otherwise, Harry could do nothing as French grabbed his arm and transported them both to the dueling room. French was glad that Remus was finally doing something about Harry, as the young man had turned into someone he didn't recognize anymore.

Remus marched into the room an hour later to find Harry standing in the center of the room tapping his foot impatiently. "So, have you had time to reconsider whether you're willing to sit down and talk to me?"

Angrier than ever, Harry shook his head. "Go to hell."

"I'll take that as a no." Remus went to turn to leave again.

"Just what are you trying to do?" Harry snarled at him.

Remus stopped and turned back to face Harry. "I just want you to think about what you're doing, Harry. You are going to ruin your life."

"It's my life to ruin." Harry snapped. "Now let me out of this room."

"No." Remus refused, and he watched as Harry's face darkened and Harry pulled out his wand. "What are you going to do, Harry? Are you going to put me under the Cruciatus, like you did to that man last night?"

Harry couldn't remember doing it, but if Remus said he had, he knew that it must be the truth. "Don't push me, Dad. All I want to do is leave the room."

"I'll do whatever I want to." Remus circled Harry.

"Stupefy." Harry sent the spell at Remus who'd already anticipated Harry's move and a shield sprang into life.

Remus shook his head. "Harry, you really don't want to do this."

"But I do." Harry didn't know why he wanted to hurt Remus; he just knew that he did.

"Accio Harry." Remus knew that Harry wouldn't have expected Remus to summon him. As Harry shot through the air, Remus simply side-stepped him and threw out his arm, knocking Harry out of the air and onto the floor.

Faster than he'd expected, Harry suddenly found himself disarmed, before Remus stepped away. "Give me my wands back."

"I don't think so." Remus threw both wands to the farthest corner of the room. "If you want them you'll have to go through me."

"Gladly." Harry snarled at Remus; his eyes beginning to glow the familiar vivid amber of a full moon.

Remus waited for Harry to make a move, and when he didn't immediately attack, he taunted him. "How does it feel to know that I've got all the power, Harry?"

"You've got nothing." Harry screamed out as launched himself at Remus. "I'm going to make you sorry you ever crossed me."

Remus sidestepped Harry once more, and sticking his leg out sent Harry crashing to the floor before laughing at him. "Now what did you say again? That's right; you're going to make me sorry aren't you?"

"Don't fucking laugh at me." Harry rolled over and got to his feet.

"But you look so pathetic, it's hard not to." Remus mocked Harry.

Angrily Harry swung at Remus again. Remus avoided Harry's punch, and landed one of his own in Harry's stomach, winding him.

Harry hadn't realized how hard a werewolf could hit, and the blow not only drove him to his knees, but he also felt several of his ribs crack from the impact. "Son of a bitch."

Remus didn't bother to wait for Harry to try to recover. Grabbing Harry's hair, he punched Harry in the face breaking his nose, before bringing Harry's chin down onto his knee. Harry collapsed onto the floor in pain. Remus knelt down beside him. "Do you understand what I'm trying to tell you now?"

Harry glared at Remus. "Fuck you."

As Harry spat blood at Remus, Remus sighed and dragged Harry back onto his feet before landing several more blows on his face. As Harry staggered backwards, Remus kicked Harry's feet from under him.

Harry thought he was going to die as his head impacted the floor with a loud crack. Remus knelt down once more, and grabbed Harry's bloody hair. "Now tell me, Harry, do you understand?"

Harry suddenly felt very afraid of his Dad as he leant over him, and all of the fight went out of him. "I understand."

Remus growled low in his throat. "Are you sure?"

Harry felt himself cower down. "Yes, Sir."

"Good." Remus normally would have healed Harry but he knew that this time he couldn't. The wolf in him wouldn't allow it. Remus walked several feet away from Harry and waited to see if Harry really did understand.

Harry struggled to his feet; his body feeling as if it was a single mass of pain. Harry looked at Remus through the one eye that was still open. "Dad?"

Remus didn't move. "Harry?"

"I'm sorry." Harry then started to cry; huge sobs that wracked his body. "I'm so sorry."

"I know you are." Remus acknowledged Harry's comments but he still didn't move.

Harry just wanted to be held and, even though Remus had hurt him the way he had, Harry surged towards Remus who held out his arms and let his son cry out his pain and anger at the world, as they both sank to the ground.

Eventually Harry's sobs lessened and he looked at Remus. "Why?"

“Because you needed to be taught a lesson.” Remus finally began to heal Harry’s injuries. “Harry, you’re my son and I love you but we’re both werewolves, and in this house there can only be one dominant werewolf. I thought you would have figured it out sooner.”

“I didn’t think it applied because you were my Dad.” Harry knew all about werewolves but hadn’t thought that Remus would attempt to dominate him. Driven by rage, he hadn’t realized that his behavior had been his attempt to do exactly that to his Dad. “I’ve wanted to lash out at you ever since I moved back in here.”

“This is partially my fault.” Remus got up and picked up a bottle of water from the refreshment table that was replenished on a daily basis. “Do you want one?”

Harry nodded. “Thanks.”

Remus sat back down on the floor. “Harry, I really should have done this when you first moved back in, but you were grieving so I held back.”

Harry halted with the water bottle half way to his mouth. “You were going to kick the shit out of me, no matter what I did?”

“Probably.” Remus admitted. “You’d have never yielded to me otherwise; well you might have if you’d been the same Harry you were before you merged.”

“I’ve felt more aggressive since I merged with the other Harry.” Harry sighed. “I think that and the fact I’m now a werewolf doesn’t really help.”

“I believe you’re right.” Remus knew that even though he’d healed Harry’s cuts, the rest of his injuries would take some time to heal because of the force he’d put behind his punches. “I’m sorry I had to hurt you like that.”

“I’ve been spoiling for a fight with you for a long time.” Harry smiled ruefully at his Dad. “You can certainly pack a punch.”

"I went through exactly the same as you did except it obviously wasn't with my Dad." Remus told him.

"Who with?" Harry couldn't remember Remus ever mentioning it before.

"It was when I was in France. I was introduced to a pack of werewolves who were only too willing to show me the ropes of pack life. I might have been quite sensible about my normal human existence but as far as my werewolf half was concerned, I was young and cocky and far too full of my own importance." Remus laughed. "I soon found out that I was way down the pecking order."

"How badly did you get hurt?" Harry finished his water, and stood up.

"If I hadn't been a werewolf I think I'd have died from my injuries." Remus stood up as well.

Harry knew that Remus had to have been beaten badly for that to be true. "Did you learn anything from it?"

"Most definitely." Remus told him. "Like I hope you have."

"I know better than to challenge you again." Harry winced as his still tender ribs made themselves known. "As I said earlier, you pack a mean punch."

"I'm bigger, stronger and a lot more experienced than you, Harry." Remus slung his arm around his son. "But even I'm going to get it in the neck from Anna when she sees the state of you. She told me to go easy on you."

"You did though, didn't you?" After finding out about Remus' own experience, Harry knew that Remus could have done a lot worse to him.

"I only did as much as it took." Remus went to open the door, only for Harry's words to stop him.

Harry was grateful to Anna for her concern but he asked the question he'd wanted to know the answer to since he'd first moved back in and seen his father and Anna interacting together. "Speaking of Anna; are you sleeping with her, Dad?" Not wanting Remus to get the wrong idea of why Harry was asking, he quickly finished his sentence. "Not that I'm judging. I just want you to be happy."

"No, Harry. I'm not." Remus gave a small smile. "We may be friends but that's as far as it goes."

"Why didn't you two get a divorce?" Harry watched Remus summon two chairs as well as his wands.

"Sit down." Remus sat facing Harry. "I'm never going to remarry and Anna doesn't see a need to get divorced unless Dae recovers, in which case she'll marry him. Because of Chloe and the other kids we've decided that, unless Dae recovers, we're going to stay together to raise them. We're not in love nor do we have any romantic feelings for each other but we do care about each other and the children."

"Losing Maman was really hard for you, wasn't it?" Harry laid a hand on Remus' arm.

Remus closed his eyes. "After losing Lily I wanted to die; in fact I hoped I'd die. If it hadn't been for everyone who refused to let me give in, I believe I would have."

Harry thought he knew how Remus felt. "I think I can relate to that."

"I'm not sure you can." Remus could see Harry about to protest. "I'm not trying to belittle your relationship with Hermione but once you've marked someone it goes deeper. Even though you were changed when she died, you'd never taken that step in your relationship."

Harry didn't agree with Remus but he wasn't going to challenge his Dad again. "How does it feel when you mark someone like that?"

Remus had been waiting for Harry to ask. "It's the most amazing adrenalin rush you'll ever experience. For your partner it's not quite so pleasant; when you bite them, it's going to hurt. But for you, you

get an intense feeling of love as well as ownership; that person is now almost part of you. It's hard to describe. You'll understand when it's your turn."

Harry shook his head. "It won't ever happen."

"Have you slept with anyone since Hermione's death?" Remus knew that some of Harry's aggression might have stemmed from sexual frustration as well as being in close contact with another alpha werewolf.

"I haven't slept with anyone since Hermione was injured." Harry didn't see the point. "What about you?"

Remus knew that being honest with Harry was the most important thing at that moment. "Yes, I have."

Harry was surprised. "Do you love her?"

"Yes, but not in the way you think." Remus then told him about Claire Grosvenor. "We've slept together on and off for years. She's a good friend as well as my on-off lover."

"And she's never married?" Harry was intrigued by Claire.

"She said she likes her own space." Remus shrugged. "I know she sleeps with other men but that's fine with me; I don't own her and she doesn't own me. She listens to me when I need a friend."

"Does Anna listen to you as well?" Harry asked as he tried to make sense of his Dad's relationships.

"She does, but what we discuss is totally different from the conversation I might have with my lover." Remus stood up. "Do you want to ask anything else?"

Harry thought for a moment. "Not right now." Harry carefully hugged Remus. "I think I'm going to take a long relaxing bath and then I'm going to apologize to everyone I've been a bastard to."

Remus grinned. "That could take you some time, couldn't it?"

Harry laughed freely, the first time he'd really done so since he'd lost Hermione. "You might be right. I think I'd better start with Anna once she gets home."

Remus followed Harry out of the room, relieved to have his son back at last.

August 1st 2002

Remus walked into the house. "Where's Harry? He was supposed to meet me for a drink and he didn't show up."

"He's upstairs." Anna knew she was going to surprise Remus.

"I'll go see him." Remus put a hand on the banister, only for Anna to shake her head. "What's up?"

"I don't think he'd appreciate it. He's not alone." Anna watched shock register on Remus' face.

"You mean he's got a woman up there?" Remus couldn't believe it.

"Yes." Anna had been as surprised as Remus was now. "So I think maybe he's finally moving on."

"I hope so." Remus looked up the stairs. "I hope so."

February 15th 2006

Harry kissed Pansy on the neck and rolled off her, before pulling her to him. "You were amazing."

Pansy snuggled up to his side, feeling happy. "I love you, Harry."

Harry stiffened. Pansy sat up. "Harry, what's wrong?"

"Pansy, I care a great deal about you, but..." Harry left the rest of the sentence hanging in mid-air.

"But you don't love me, do you?" Pansy slipped out of the bed.

Harry knew he had to be honest. "I told you that after Hermione there'd be no chance of my ever falling in love with anyone else."

"You might change your mind." Pansy could feel tears starting to well up.

Harry shook his head. "I won't. I'm sorry."

"I guess that's that then." Pansy grabbed her clothes and ran into the bathroom.

Harry scowled as he lay back in bed. He had a feeling that a very different Pansy would come back out of the bathroom, and he wasn't wrong.

Pansy finished showering and dressing and marched back into the bedroom. "Why didn't you tell me this two months' ago? You must have known I was starting to fall for you."

"Pansy, you knew the score before we slept together." Harry had been upfront when he'd starting seeing her six months previously.

"Harry, you took me to Europe with you for Christmas." Pansy could feel her temper rising. "You bought me gifts."

"Pansy, I did it because I thought you might like a holiday." Harry ducked as a vase sailed through the air at him. "And I bought a lot of people gifts." Harry realized he'd said the wrong thing when a bowl joined the vase in meeting its demise.

"You bastard." Pansy screamed. "And when you asked me here for lunch today, I thought you were going to propose."

Harry was surprised. "I've never once let you believe that I would."

“You told me you had something special to ask me.” Pansy picked up a candle and hurled it at Harry. “What the hell did you expect me to think when you said that?”

Harry plucked the candle out of the air before it also hit the wall. “I was going to ask if you’d come as my date to Scarlett’s wedding.”

Pansy was stunned. “How on earth did you think that qualified as something special? I’d already been invited.”

“Because out of all the women I know, you were the one I most wanted to go with me.” Harry started to explain only to have his words cut off as Pansy stormed over to him.

Pansy slapped Harry across the face. “You arrogant shit. I thought I was the only woman in your life.”

Harry grabbed her hand as she went to slap him again. “Pansy, I told you that our relationship wasn’t exclusive.”

“But you let me think it had become that way.” Pansy pulled free of Harry, tears starting to run down as her face. “I hate you.”

Harry watched as Pansy stormed out before vanishing the mess she’d made and sitting down on his bed. He’d thought that Pansy had been alright with their relationship the way it was; obviously he’d been wrong. Getting up he padded into the bathroom and turned on the shower. When he came out of the bathroom, Seville was standing in his doorway, her arms crossed. “What have you done to Pansy?”

“It’s none of your business, Sevvie.” Harry told the girl.

“It is when she ends up banging on my bedroom door in tears.” Seville felt a little uncomfortable at the sight of Harry in just a towel, water still running down his bare chest. “For goodness sake, get something on.”

Harry knew then how to get rid of Seville from his rooms. “If you insist.”

Seville gave an indignant squawk and turned her back as Harry simply dropped the towel. "Very funny, Lupin."

"I thought it was." Harry picked the towel back up and started to dry himself off. "What exactly is it that you expect me to do?"

With her back still turned and her face bright red, Seville felt at a disadvantage. "Harry, can you please get dressed so that I can turn round and talk to you?"

"You can turn round now if you want to; I don't mind." Harry laughed as he heard her harrumph. "I'm decent."

Seville turned round to find Harry slipping into his trousers. "Why have you been seeing Pansy for so long if you knew it wasn't going anywhere?"

"I told Pansy when I first started seeing her that our relationship wasn't exclusive and that it was purely about sex, nothing else." Harry pulled a crisp white shirt from his closet and slid it on. "She was more than aware that she'd get burnt if she wanted more than that."

"Harry, you've been treating her like you'd treat someone you cared about." Seville pointed out.

"That's because I do care about her." Harry combed his hair into the neat, short hair cut he'd worn since Hermione's death.

"Right now I'm finding that hard to believe." Seville watched Harry pour out a large firewhiskey. "And another thing, Harry, you can't keep drinking like this."

"I can do whatever I want." Harry hated being berated about his behavior. "I'm twenty-five, and not five in case you've forgotten."

"Well try acting like it then." Seville snapped.

"Sevvie, it really is none of your business what I do." Harry knocked back the contents of the glass. "Was there anything else?"

Seville walked over to him. "You're self-destructing, Harry. Maybe not quickly like we thought you were going to, but you're still doing it. It's not just women and your drinking; you've got no focus. You refuse to find a job or do anything that might interrupt your playtime."

"I don't need to work in case you've forgotten." Harry didn't tell her that he did actually have a job working under Nic Flamel; he just couldn't talk to her about it.

"Neither do I, but I still do it." Seville started to walk back toward the door. "Harry, you need to find someone to care for and who will care for you. You've got to give up these casual relationships."

"So says the woman whose relationships usually last barely long enough for anyone to learn their names, let alone meet them." Harry had lost track of Seville's boyfriends.

Seville didn't tell him that quite a few of her relationships had ended because she'd refused to sleep with the boy in question. "At least I don't act as if I care about someone, only to dash their hopes when they admit to being in love with me."

"As I've already told you, Pansy knew the score." Harry slipped his favorite cashmere sweater on. "After Hermione that was it for me."

"Harry, you can't spend the rest of your life pining over your dead wife. It's never going to bring her back." Seville regretted her words only moments later as Harry's face fell. "Harry, I'm sorry."

Harry turned his back on her. "Just fuck off, Seville."

Knowing she'd crossed the line, Seville did as Harry had demanded and left.

Later that evening

Seville and Robert were hunting around the bedroom floor when a cough interrupted them, making Seville jump. "Harry, you scared me."

“Are you looking for this?” Harry held out a pearl earring in his left hand; his right hand had his usual glass in it.

Seville grabbed the earring from him; she hadn’t expected to see him after their earlier argument. “Where did you find this?”

“On my bedroom floor where you dropped it.” Harry slid fully into the bedroom. “You’re going out with Marsters aren’t you?”

“Obviously.” Seville picked up her black shoes and slipped them on.

“You could do so much better.” Harry watched as his glass refilled.

Seville kissed Robert on the cheek. “Thanks for helping me look but I’ve got it from here.”

Robert knew that his Mum and Harry were going to be having what was termed as an ‘adults only’ conversation in their household. “Goodnight Mum.” He smiled at Harry as he went by. “Goodnight Uncle Harry.”

“Goodnight, Robert.” Harry ruffled Robert’s hair as he slipped by him, before Harry closed the door.

Seville turned on Harry. “Now my son’s gone, I want to know exactly what you mean.”

“You’re dating the biggest stuffed shirt on the planet, Sevvie.” Harry hated Seville’s boyfriend, who was chief editor at the Prophet where Seville worked as a reporter. “He’s got to be the most boring guy ever. I really don’t know what you see in him.”

“He treats me well and he likes Robert.” Seville had been seeing him for almost four months which was the longest any of her relationships, except for Jamie, had ever lasted. “And I care about him.”

“But you don’t love him, do you?” Harry took a sip of the scotch, barely even registering the taste.

"No, I don't." Seville admitted. "But I'm not looking for a long term relationship and we're both content with things as they stand."

Harry snorted. "I can't believe that earlier today you stood there and told me off about not wanting a long-term relationship with Pansy, when you refuse to do the same thing with someone else. It's a little hypocritical if you ask me."

"Well I didn't." Seville snapped. "At least I appreciate the company of the opposite sex, which is more than I can say for you."

Harry smirked. "Just because I don't intend to settle down with someone, doesn't mean I don't appreciate the company of the opposite sex."

Seville frowned at him. "You're becoming just like Dad was; a serial womanizer." Seville then blushed. Remus had been quite open with her about his past once she'd reached her seventh year as he'd wanted to warn her about men like himself. "Being with someone else isn't just about sex, Harry."

"For me it is." Harry sniffed the air as Seville sprayed perfume over her pulse points. "You really don't need that shit on you know."

"Ashley likes it." Seville protested.

"Do you?" Harry picked up the bottle and, after sniffing it again and wrinkling his nose, dropped it into the waste paper bin.

"Not particularly, but as he bought it me for Christmas, I feel as if I should wear it when we go out." Seville really hated the scent.

Harry unholstered his ever present wand. "Evanescio Nidor."

Seville had to be honest; she felt better after Harry removed the offensive odor. "I don't know what Ashley will say."

"The Seville I know, wouldn't care." Harry looked her up and down. "You don't even dress like you used to."

Seville looked down at the black dress, which was at least ten years too old for her. "But..."

"Don't tell me." Harry put his wand away. "Ashley likes it."

Seville looked at the time. "He does and I have to go."

"You accused me of self-destructing earlier. You're on the same path." Harry leant against the door jamb. "You've dated yes, but you've not let a guy get close to you since you found about Jamie."

"What do you expect?" Seville picked up her wrap. "He was a bastard who only cared about one thing, power."

"Not all men are like that, Sevvie." Harry passed over her purse.

"So says the prime example of the perfect male specimen." Seville snapped, before sighing. "Look Harry, I really don't want to get into another argument." She put a hand on his arm. "I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I was out of order."

"You were but I'll accept your apology if you'll accept mine." Harry kissed her on the cheek. "If Marsters makes you happy, then that's okay with me. As long as he knows I'll rip him apart if he hurts you."

Seville grinned. "I think I've heard this speech from Dad and Mum."

"Good." Harry stepped away from the door. "Have a nice night."

"Thanks, Harry." Seville walked out.

June 24th 2006

Hearing a shriek, Harry went running into the sitting room, his wand drawn, only to find Seville holding court. "I thought something was wrong."

Luna smiled at him. "Not at all."

Robert, who had both Emily and Katie on his lap, grinned at Harry. "Hi Uncle Harry. Have you seen Mum's ring yet?"

At Robert's words, Seville held out her left hand. Harry slowly took it and looked at the large diamond nestled in the platinum ring before dropping it and stalking out.

Sevvie turned hurt eyes to Auri. "What's his problem?"

Luna thought she knew. "Stay here; I'll talk to him."

Sevvie frowned and turned to Auri. "I thought he'd be happy for me. He told me a few months ago I should settle down."

"Men." Auri had had a huge row with her on-again, off-again boyfriend, Daniel. "Can't live with them, can't kill them."

Robert giggled. "Auntie Auri!"

Luna made her way up to Harry's rooms and knocked on the door. "Can I come in?"

"Of course." Harry had a glass of scotch in his hand. "What's up?"

"Why haven't you told Seville that you're in love with her?" Luna got straight to the heart of the matter.

"Because I'm not." Harry denied Luna's accusation. "I just don't want to see her marrying that asshole."

"Harry, I also think she's making a mistake marrying Ashley." Luna sat down on Harry's bed. "I know she doesn't love him."

"So you're trying to tell me that she loves me, are you?" Harry looked incredulously at Luna. "If you are, I don't see it."

"I don't know who she loves, but I do think you're in love with her." Luna patted the bed. "Harry, come sit down."

Harry, who disagreed with Luna's supposition, reluctantly sat down next to his sister-in-law. "This had better be quick as I've got a date."

"I'll get to the point then." Luna took Harry's hand in her own. "When Hermione died, we all thought we'd lose you; then you started dating again and we thought it would get better. But it hasn't has it?"

"Losing Hermione was the hardest thing ever for me." Harry closed his eyes. "I don't ever want to go through that kind of pain again."

"Harry, pain is part of what makes us what we are." Luna knew that Harry didn't really want to hear this but she continued nevertheless. "Without it, we can't function. Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying that we all want to go through the heart-rending pain you went through but sometimes we need it just to remember who we are."

"I already know who I am, Luna." Harry stood up. "I don't mean to be rude but I really do need to get ready."

Luna stood on her tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. "If you need me, I'll be around."

"Goodnight, Luna." Harry watched the door close before stalking into the bathroom to get showered. He had a date he didn't want to miss.

May 17th 2007

Harry was walking along the landing when his sharp hearing picked up the sound of sobbing. Harry tapped tentatively at Seville's door, and put his head around. "Can I come in?"

Seville blew her nose. "Harry. I thought you had a date."

"I wasn't in the mood." Harry didn't tell her his date had been a meeting that had been cancelled. "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing. I'm just being silly." Seville felt embarrassed at being caught crying.

"I don't believe you." Harry led Seville over to the chair by her fireplace. "You're getting married in two days and..." Harry's voice trailed off as Seville started crying again. "Please tell me what's wrong."

Seville took a deep breath. "I think I've made a big mistake and it's too late to change my mind."

Harry knelt down in front of Seville. "You mean marrying Marsters, don't you?"

She nodded and started to cry again. "But it's too late now. The wedding's in two days' time."

"Sevvie, you don't have to go through with it if you don't want to." Harry passed her his handkerchief.

"But Dad and Mum have paid for everything already." Seville cried even harder as she thought of what Remus and Anna had done for her. "And Chloe was so excited about being a bridesmaid. And so was Robert about being an usher."

"The money isn't the issue here nor are the children, Sevvie." Harry could easily recompense Remus without even noticing it. "It's your happiness. If you don't want to marry him, then don't."

"Oh, Harry." Seville stood up. "I don't but I'm so afraid of what Ashley will do when he finds out."

Harry felt his hackles go up. "Has he ever hurt you?"

Seville didn't tell Harry that Ashley had once slapped her during argument but had been immediately regretful afterwards. "No, but he'll be very angry."

"I'll tell him." Harry told her.

Seville blew her nose again. "If I'm going to do this, I need to tell him."

"Let me come with you then." Harry offered. "I can't let you go alone."

Seville looked hopefully at Harry. "Would you?"

"Get your cloak." Harry waited for Seville to get her cloak. "I'll stay out of the way while you tell him."

Seville grabbed a cloak from her closet. "Ashley's probably going to be at the Prophet still."

"Take my arm." Harry then side-apparated them both to the Prophet. "Go ahead."

Seville nervously made her way to Ashley's office and knocked on the door.

Ashley looked up and smiled at the sight of his fiancée. "Seville, darling. I didn't expect to see you until the wedding."

Seville felt her tears start again as she thought about the wedding. "I need to talk to you about the wedding, Ashley."

Ashley got up. "You seem upset."

"I'm really sorry, Ashley, but I can't marry you." Seville let out a breath as she told him.

Ashley smiled. "It's simply pre-wedding jitters." He put his hands on the top of Seville's arms and looked down into her face. "Every bride gets them. Mother said she was surprised you hadn't yet."

Seville shook her head. "It's not pre-wedding jitters, Ashley. I'm sorry but I really can't marry you."

Ashley let go of her as he realized she was serious. "You can't change your mind now. The wedding's only two days away. Gifts have been coming in for weeks. What am I supposed to tell everyone?"

"That it's not your fault." Seville could see that he was hurt. "But I know it would be a huge mistake if I went ahead with the wedding."

Ashley couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Is there someone else?"

"No." Seville shook her head. "I just realized I don't love you enough to marry you."

"You can't do this to me, Seville." Ashley thought about how people would react when they found out. "I'll be a laughing stock."

"I doubt that." Seville looked at the picture he had of her on his desk. "You can tell people whatever you want to."

"I can't believe this." Ashley looked devastated. "Mother said I was making a mistake."

Seville knew that Hortense Marsters didn't like her. "And she's obviously right."

Ashley's face took on a placatory look. He pulled Seville towards him. "Seville, I love you. Please reconsider."

"I'm sorry, Ashley." Seville pulled free of his grasp. "But my mind's made up. I can't marry you."

Ashley grabbed her by the arms. "I was willing to overlook the fact that you were You-Know-Who's daughter to marry you, and this is how you treat me." He pulled Seville close and kissed her roughly. "You will marry me on Saturday."

"I think you should let her go, Marsters." Harry stood in the doorway, anger written all over his features. "She's already told you no."

At the sight of Harry, Ashley's face turned ugly and he thrust Seville away from him. "You're making a big mistake not marrying me. See if you'll find anyone else willing to take on you and your brat. Oh, and by the way, you're fired."

Seville gasped at Ashley's parting rejoinder. She loved her job and she span round, tears making their way down her cheeks again.

Harry let Seville walk by him. "Head down to the apparition point; I'll be there in a moment."

Ashley waited for Harry to say something to him. He wasn't prepared for the speed that Harry covered the distance between them in. Harry grabbed him by the throat and lifted him off his feet. "I'll say this only once. If I ever hear or find out that you've said anything of a derogatory nature about Seville or her son or you ever lay a finger on her again, I swear I'll kill you. And believe me, I won't be in a hurry to do it. Do I make myself clear?"

Ashley struggled to nod as Harry was holding him almost immobile. Harry let him go and he dropped to the ground. "I pity whoever finally marries you. I'm just glad Seville came to her senses in time. I'll send someone to collect her things. And you needn't worry about cancelling the wedding; I'll do it gladly."

Harry rushed after Seville, catching up with her just as she reached the apparition point. Harry pulled her into his arms as she sobbed. "Let's get you home."

Harry apparated them both directly in his rooms. "Let me get you a drink."

Seville sat on Harry's bed and knocked back the brandy he fetched her. "I can't believe he sacked me."

"I thought you were more upset about his comment about Voldemort." Harry put his arm around Seville.

Seville shook her head. "Remus is my Dad, not Voldemort, so I don't give a shit about Ashley's comment but I loved my job."

"You can work for me." Harry offered.

"For you?" Seville put down the brandy glass.

Harry had been looking to invest and had made an offer to his sister-in-law. "I've bought the Quibbler from Luna. She hasn't got the time to run it with four children to look after."

"Why didn't you say anything before now?" Seville walked over to Harry's bar and poured herself a glass of wine.

"Because I didn't think you'd be interested." Harry admitted. "But I'd rather have someone I can trust running the whole thing."

Seville was shocked by Harry's offer. "I'm a reporter, Harry. You can't just expect me to take something like that over."

"Sevvie, just because Marsters kept you down, doesn't mean I will." Harry smiled at her. "So how about it?"

Seville knew that this was the opportunity of a lifetime but she still had reservations. "Are you doing this because I'm family?"

Harry stood up. "Business is one thing; family is another. I wouldn't offer you the job if I didn't have every belief you could do it."

Seville burst into tears again. "I'd love the job."

"That's settled then." Harry pulled her to him and wrapped his arms around her. "It's yours."

Seville leant against Harry, wrapping her own arms around him, before suddenly pulling away.

Harry was surprised at the abruptness of Seville's action; he could sense she was nervous. "Is something wrong, Sevvie?"

"I'm just a little on edge." Seville hoped that Harry would blame her pulling away from him on just having cancelled her wedding.

"I understand." Harry passed Seville her glass of wine. "How would you like to join me for some Chinese?"

Seville was surprised to find she felt hungry. "You know how to tempt a girl, don't you?"

Harry laughed. "I'll be back in about twenty minutes. Can you ask Tikkum to set up the table?"

Seville waited for Harry to apparate out before calling Tikkum and then hurrying to her room to get changed. She wanted to get out of the clothes she was wearing and into something more comfortable.

When she returned, Harry was putting down various cartons. "I got your favorite."

Seville grinned as she opened the carton of noodles. "Thanks."

"You're welcome." Harry sat down opposite her and the two began eating. Half way through the meal, Harry looked over at Seville. "I've sent a message to Dad and Anna to tell them what's happened."

"Harry, you shouldn't have disturbed them at school." Seville was in no hurry to face them.

"I think they'd want to know." Harry got up as he heard footsteps coming towards his room. "This will be them now."

Remus rushed into the room and held out his arms. "Sevvie."

"Dad." Seville dropped her chopsticks and rushed over to Remus. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be." Remus could feel her shaking. "I'm just glad you found out before you actually married him."

"But you've spent so much on the wedding." Seville tried to hold her tears back.

Anna put a hand on her face. "And it doesn't matter about that. We'd do anything for you."

Seville gave into her tears again. "I know you're rich but it was still a lot of money."

Anna shook her head. "My Dad would be more than happy to reimburse me if I needed it. Sevvie, as long as you feel you are doing the right thing, then that's all that matters."

"I do." Seville admitted. "I couldn't go through with it."

"Then I'll arrange for it to be cancelled." Anna knew just the people for the job. "Dad's got enough assistants; this will be a chance for them to have something fun to do."

"I can't bother Grandpa's assistants." Seville felt uncomfortable about the idea.

Anna kissed Seville on the forehead. "They'll do exactly as Dad tells them. Now we know you're alright, we need to get back to school. I don't want to leave Robert and the girls on their own for too long. I'll leave you and Harry to finish your meal."

Seville let go of Remus and hugged Anna. "Goodnight, Mum."

"Goodnight, Sevvie." Anna kissed her and together she and Remus left the room.

Harry led Seville back to the table before reheating their food. "I told you it would be alright."

Sevvie started to cry again before wiping her eyes. "I'm sorry, Harry."

Harry got up and dragged her off her chair so that he could hold her. "You're obviously stressed."

"Would you mind if I cut the evening off early?" Seville suddenly felt exhausted. "I just feel as if I want to sleep."

"Go ahead." Harry kissed Seville on her forehead. "I'll see you in the morning."

After checking the time, Harry vanished the mess of food from the table and headed for the shower.

August 20th 2007

Seville jumped as Harry emerged from the shadows. "Harry, you scared me."

"Do you have any idea what time it is?" Harry looked a lot like Remus used to when she was younger and had stayed out late.

"Harry, I was working on a piece for the paper and forgot the time." Seville dropped her bag onto the side table in the hallway. "I didn't miss anything important did I?"

"No." Harry let out a sigh. "But I was worried when you didn't come home."

"Harry, I'm a big girl now. And you don't see Dad and Mum standing down here waiting for me to get home." Seville poured herself a glass of wine. "And with the security you've installed at the Quibbler, no-one's getting within fifty feet of me without sounding a general alarm."

Harry had beefed up the security before he'd even allowed Seville to step foot across the threshold. "You're high profile, Seville."

"I know that." Seville had received her fair share of hate mail from those who couldn't separate Voldemort from her.

"So tell me, how are things going?" Harry sat down.

"Honestly, I didn't think I could love a job as much as the one I had at the Prophet." Seville took a sip of her wine. "But this job is the best job I've ever had."

Harry relaxed. "Good."

Seville frowned as she noticed red blooming on Harry's white shirt. "Harry, you're bleeding."

“Shit.” Harry went to leave the room only for Seville to put out a hand to stop him.

“Show me.” Seville wanted to know what Harry had been up to. “Now, Harry.”

Harry reluctantly shed his shirt to reveal the nasty wound that was running along his shoulder. “It’s nothing, Sevvie.”

“Why haven’t you healed it?” Seville pulled out her wand.

“Because so far it’s been resistant to all forms of healing.” Harry called out to Tikkum. “Can you fetch me something to clean this and a patch?”

Seville took the liquid and patch from the house-elf when he returned and carefully began to clean Harry’s wound. “Are you going to tell me how you got this?”

“In a fight.” Harry winced as Seville poured some of the liquid into the open cut.

Seville affixed the patch over his shoulder. “I thought you’d given that up.”

“It’s not quite as bad it sounds.” Harry was finally able to tell Seville what he did. “I’m an Unspeakable, Sevvie.”

“You mean all this time, I’ve thought you were some sort of playboy, and you were out there risking your life?” Sevvie felt guilty.

“I couldn’t tell you.” Harry ran his hand through his hair; his usual habit when he was tired or stressed. “I initially bought the Quibbler as an investment but the higher-ups have asked if I can use it as a front for getting messages to other agents. I was given permission to tell you a few days ago but something came up before I got the chance.”

“Have you let Auri see that?” Seville passed Harry’s stained shirt to Tikkum who took it away together with the cleansing fluid she’d used.

“No.” Harry knew that he should. “I’ll do it tomorrow.”

“Make sure you do.” Seville yawned. “Well I’m off to bed.”

“Goodnight.” Harry leant forward to kiss Seville on the cheek, only for her to go the opposite way; their lips brushing gently against each others.

Seville blushed. “Sorry.”

“It’s okay.” Harry lied. “Oh before you go to bed, I forget to tell you that I won’t be able to make the meeting you’d got planned for Wednesday. I’ll be out of the country for a while.”

“Another playboy cruise?” Seville teased now that she knew the truth.

“You know me.” Harry winked at her as he picked up his glass of scotch.

“I’ll miss you.” Seville realized that she would.

Harry raised an eyebrow. “Really?”

“Yes, really.” Seville went to walk out, only for Harry to stop her.

“Why will you miss me?” Harry could smell the remnants of the light floral perfume that she’d sprayed on that morning, and it was driving him crazy.

Seville couldn’t control the red that stained her cheeks at Harry’s question. “I miss all of my family when they’re not around, Harry.”

“No more than that, Seville?” Harry decided to face up to what he’d been denying for a long time; that he was attracted to Seville.

“What do you mean?” Seville now felt very uncomfortable.

“What do you think I mean?” Harry stepped even closer to Seville.

“Harry, I don’t know what game you’re playing but it’s not funny.” Seville could feel herself panicking.

“It’s no game Seville.” Harry put down his glass of scotch. “Can I ask you something?”

“Harry, I’m going to bed.” Seville almost felt as if she was being hunted as Harry stepped closer to her.

“Please, Seville.” Harry pushed a piece of her hair, which had strayed out of the neat bun she wore, behind her ear. “All I want is for you to answer one question truthfully for me.”

Wanting to escape, Seville nodded jerkily. “Fine, ask your question.

“Do you promise to answer me truthfully?” Harry kept his eyes locked on Seville’s face.

“Yes, I promise to answer truthfully.” Seville wondered what Harry wanted to know.

“Are you attracted to me, Sevvie?” Harry watched Seville’s face carefully as he asked.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Seville felt as if she couldn’t breathe.

“I think you are, aren’t you?” Harry pulled her gently towards him.

“I don’t know what you mean...” Seville’s words dried up as Harry lowered his head and gently brushed his lips over hers.

“Please tell me the truth.” Harry murmured against her lips as he nibbled softly on her bottom lip.

Seville moaned softly. “Please, Harry. No.”

Harry ignored her protest, and continued to tease her, until eventually she relaxed and opened up to him. As Seville began to whimper, Harry broke off the kiss. “You are, aren’t you?”

Seville felt frightened by her reaction to him. "Harry, let me go."

Sensing her fear, Harry let her go and watched as she fled to her room.

Seville dashed into the bathroom once she'd reached her room. She almost didn't recognize the wide-eyed woman staring back at her. Splashing cold water on her face, she walked back into her bedroom only to hear a knock at the door. She knew it would be Harry. Gritting her teeth she marched over, and flung open the door. "Harry, I'm tired."

"I just wanted to apologize." Harry stepped inside the room and closed the door. "I shouldn't have done that."

Seville let out the breath she'd been holding. "No, Harry you shouldn't have."

"It won't happen again." Harry turned to leave.

"Don't go." Seville suddenly found that she didn't want him to go. "I don't want you to leave angry."

"I'm not angry with you, Sevvie." Harry was telling the truth.

Seville walked over to Harry. "I just want to know that you'll still be my friend."

"Don't be silly." Harry kissed her forehead, glad when she didn't pull away. "I'll always be your friend, and I'm really sorry about this evening. I read too much into something that obviously wasn't there."

"It really is okay, Harry." Seville went to move towards the door, only to trip on the edge of her carpet. "Ouch."

Harry pulled out a chair. "Sit down."

Seville sat down. "It's okay, Harry. I just twisted my ankle."

Harry took Seville's foot in his hand. "Let me look."

Seville yanked her foot away and stood up, reddening. "It's fine, Harry.

Harry looked down at Seville, topping her by more than six inches. "Then what's wrong?"

"Nothing." Seville wouldn't look at him.

Harry gently crooked his fingers under her chin and tilted her head up. "Sevvie?"

Seville was almost mesmerized by Harry's eyes. Up close she could see the green flecks that permeated the amber that they'd turned after he'd bitten. "I, err, I..."

Harry watched Seville's pupils dilate, and he had a feeling that she hadn't been totally upfront with him. "Sevvie, I'm only going to ask you this once more. After that I'll never ask again. Are you attracted to me?"

Knowing that Harry was going to walk out if she wasn't honest with him, Seville nodded. "Yes."

At Seville's answer, Harry splayed out the hand that was holding Seville's chin and slid it around to the back of her neck. Seville closed her eyes as she waited for the feel of Harry's lips on hers. She almost opened her eyes again as she felt his lips caress her neck instead. Harry could feel Seville's heartbeat under his lips, and he gently suckled on it, reveling in the small sound she made at the back of her throat. Harry continued to tease her until finally he pulled back. "Kiss me, Seville."

Seville languidly opened her eyes, and taking a deep breath, ran her thumb softly over his bottom lip, before covering Harry's lips with her own. She then slowly increased the pressure, and let her tongue flutter briefly over his lips, asking for an invitation. Harry acquiesced and groaned as Seville slipped her hands into his hair. Eventually, needing air, Seville ended the kiss, and went to move away, feeling a little self-conscious.

Harry's arms stopped her from moving backwards. "Sevvie, stay with me tonight."

Seville stiffened. "No."

Harry let go of her. "But you do want me, don't you?"

"I do." Seville admitted. "But I'm not into one-night stands."

"Sevvie, you mean more to me than a one-night stand." Harry stroked her hair away from her face.

"What about Hermione?" Seville knew she couldn't sleep with him with the ghost of Hermione hanging over their heads.

"Hermione's no longer here, Sevvie." Harry believed that he'd said goodbye to Hermione some time ago.

"But you're still in love with her." Seville knew that while she'd realized that she was in love with Harry some time ago, he would never feel the same way about her because of Hermione. "And I don't know how you feel about me."

"I'm no longer in love with Hermione but I'll always love her." Harry wanted to be honest with Seville. "And I care about you more than anyone else I know."

Seville noticed that even though Harry had said he cared about her, he hadn't said that he was in love with her. "I'm still not sure what to do, Harry."

Harry took her hand in his and brushed his lips across her knuckles, before pulling her close to him. "I'll never do anything to hurt you, Sevvie."

Seville closed her eyes as Harry kissed her. But instead of asking him to go after the kiss as she'd intended to, she clung to him as he kissed her again and again, until eventually Harry drew back. "Seville, what do you want?"

"I don't know." Seville could hear her voice trembling.

Reaching out, Harry started to pull out the hairpins that were suspending Seville's hair until eventually it fell in soft ringlets around her face. Harry's breath caught at the picture she made; her hair falling around her face, the casual dress she was wearing highlighting her figure. "You are so very lovely."

Seville felt nervous and made a joke. "You're not so bad yourself."

Harry shook his head. "I'm not joking." He then took her hand again. "Sevvie, do you want me to stay?"

Seville had thought that her heart couldn't beat any faster; she was wrong. "Yes."

Harry didn't hesitate and closed the gap between the two of them. Seville responded enthusiastically, pressing her body against Harry's, before giving a little cry as Harry scooped her up and carried her towards the bed.

Harry loved the way that Seville's lips felt under his own, and began kissing her again. Seville suddenly realized that her dress had gone when she felt cooler air caress her body as skin contacted skin. Braless, she attempted to cover herself up, only for Harry to gently pull her hands aside as he swept kisses across her breasts. Seville gave into the sensations and held his head against her, wanting more. Pulling free, Harry lifted Seville onto her bed as he began to shed his clothing.

Seville felt heat infuse her face as she watched Harry undress and she wondered if she should divest herself of her final piece of clothing. Her question was answered as Seville gasped as Harry joined her on the bed before lowering his head to her stomach and caressed it with his tongue and lips before removing the final piece of clothing she was wearing. He then slowly kissed his way back up to Seville's mouth.

Seville ran her hands over Harry's back as his kisses became more demanding. Seville whimpered as Harry's hand cupped her breast

gently teasing her nipple into hardness before Harry's hand left her breast and moved lower. Harry nuzzled her neck, alternating between soft nips and gentle kisses. Just when she thought she couldn't take it anymore, Harry moved to cover her body with his own, claiming her mouth again for a long, hot kiss.

Harry could feel Seville shaking almost uncontrollably beneath him and wanted nothing more than to bury himself in her heat. As she gave a small moan, he slid into her. As Harry moved above her, Seville couldn't believe the sensations that were starting to course through her body. Pulling Harry's head down to her own, Seville moaned into his mouth as heat began to build inside her. Harry hissed as Seville sank her nails into his back as she began to move quicker beneath him, seeking that elusive moment.

As he felt Seville convulse around him, pulling him further in, Harry knew he wasn't going to last much longer, and he gave into his own desires. Harry then rolled over, pulling Seville with him so that she lay across him, before dropping a kiss onto her head. As Seville heard Harry's breathing even out, she kissed his chest. "I love you, Harry."

One month later

Harry knocked on his Dad's office door. "Dad, can I speak to you?"

"Of course, Harry." Remus put down what he was working on and moved around the desk.

"Somewhere private might be a good idea." Harry suggested.

Remus led Harry into the study off the Headmaster's office. "Is everything alright?"

"Not exactly." Harry closed the door. "Sevvie's pregnant."

Remus frowned. "Why didn't she tell me herself? I admit I'm not happy about it but I wouldn't have taken it out on her."

"Because I'm the one who got her pregnant." Harry admitted.

Remus' unhappiness turned to anger. "What the fuck you were thinking? She's not one of your women, Harry."

"I know she's not, Dad." Harry backed off a little at the anger in Remus' face.

"So what are you going to do about it?" Remus demanded to know.

"The right thing." Harry pulled out a piece of parchment. "I picked up a wedding license this morning."

Remus still wasn't entirely happy about the whole thing. "I doubt it's the wedding she imagined having particularly after the Marsters fiasco."

"Dad, it's not exactly the wedding I imagined me having either." Harry smiled a little bitterly. "Actually, I never imagined ever getting married again but I do care about her."

"So you haven't marked her?" Remus asked quietly.

Harry shook his head. "No, I told you once that I doubt I'll ever experience that." Harry had a question in return for Remus. "Have you marked Anna?"

Remus shook his head. "I love Anna and I'd do anything for her but Lily was my true mate."

Harry liked Anna but he felt a small measure of relief at Remus' words. "I understand." Harry looked at his Dad. "I'm sorry things have happened this way but I'll take care of Seville."

"I know you will, Harry." Remus hugged his son, and the two of them left his study to tell Anna.

5th April 2008

Harry rushed into the hospital room. "Sevvie, she's beautiful."

"I know." Seville was tired but happy. "I feel as if I've run a marathon but the entire labor lasted only a couple of hours."

"I'm sorry I wasn't here." Harry had been in Australia when his daughter had decided to make an early appearance.

"I think she got tired of waiting to meet her Daddy." Seville kissed Harry as a knock sounded at the door. "Come in."

Robert poked his head around the door. "Hi Mum."

"What are you doing here? You're supposed to be in school." Seville nevertheless held out her arms for Robert to hug her. "Have you seen your sister yet?"

Robert nodded enthusiastically. "Dad took me into see her before we came up here. She's pretty red-faced isn't she?"

Harry play-cuffed Robert around the head. "You're supposed to say she's the most beautiful thing you've ever seen."

"Dad!" Robert laughed at Harry. "She's perfect."

Seville smiled at the two favorite men in her life. "Now that's the right answer." She yawned again. "I'm sorry."

"Go to sleep, sweetheart." Harry kissed Seville as she closed her eyes.

Robert frowned. "Is Mum alright, Dad?"

"She's just tired, mate." Harry put his arm around Robert. "I'll tell you what, you can come back to Grimmauld Square with me. I'll bring you back here tomorrow to see your Mum once she's awake before I return you to school."

"That would be great." Robert was delighted at the thought of spending some time alone with Harry. Harry had asked him what Robert had wanted to call him and the boy had immediately opted for 'Dad'.

Harry apparated them both to Grimmauld Square. Robert sat down opposite Harry in the family room. "Dad, now that the new baby's here, do you want to give her the Potter inheritance?"

Harry frowned. "I thought we explained this to you, Robert. You are the Potter heir no matter how many children we have." Knowing that he'd never be able to have a son and as the Potter inheritance passed via the male line, Harry had used the same archaic ritual that Severus had used with Hermione and had made Robert his blood heir.

"But I'm not really yours am I?" Robert knew he sounded like a baby but he wanted Harry's reassurance.

"Robert, you're as much mine as your new sister is." Harry got up and put his arm around his son. "I love you just as much and I always will."

Robert let Harry give him a brief hug before pulling away. "Thanks, Dad."

"You're welcome, Robert." Harry and Seville had discussed it and they both had a feeling that Robert would be feeling a little insecure, which was one of the reasons Harry had taken him out of school so that he wouldn't feel left out.

Robert picked up one of the cookies that Tikkum had brought in. "So what are you going to call her?"

Harry knew that his words would tickle Robert. "Kennedy Roberta Grace Potter."

Robert's face lit up. "Did you call her Roberta after me?"

"Yep." Harry dipped his cookie into his milk; he never drank alcohol anymore when he was around Robert. "So what do you think?"

"I think Kennedy's a cool name." Robert sucked the milk out of his cookie giggling at Harry when he did the same. "Where did you get it from?"

"Cassie suggested it." Harry told him. "I have no idea where she got it from."

Robert suddenly realized where Cassie had plucked the name from. "I think I know. You know that Buffy series where she kills the vampires?"

"Yes?" Harry hadn't actually watched it.

"It's Aunt Cassie's favorite show, even though it's ended, and I know there's a girl in it called Kennedy." Robert informed his Dad.

Harry shrugged. "I don't really care where she got it from because your Mum and I really liked it and your sister definitely looks like a Kennedy."

Robert yawned. "She does."

Harry stood up. "Come on, it's time for bed."

Harry doused the lights as he followed his son out of the room.

7th November 2012

The woman sat in her office typing up her latest piece on the new British Minister for Magic, Kingsley Shacklebolt, who'd beaten the incumbent Rufus Scrimgeour by a large margin, to become the first black British Minister for Magic.

Harry pushed open the office door. "Hello Crystal."

Crystal paled at the sight of Harry standing the entrance to her office. "Harry Lupin, isn't it?"

"Now, now, Rita." Harry walked into the office. "There's no need to play games with me. I know exactly who you really are."

"I don't know what you mean." Crystal told him.

"But I think you do." Harry turned and closed the door before sitting on the edge of Crystal's desk. "How do you think the papers are going to print it?"

"Print what?" Crystal had by now edged her hand towards her wand.

"The death of Voldemort's missing lieutenant." Harry knew what she was doing.

Crystal shrugged. "As I have no idea who it is, I really don't know."

Harry could see the woman in front of him was unsettled. "Well if you're not who I think you are, then I'll leave and apologize."

"In that case, I suggest you do exactly that." Crystal kept her hand on her wand, only to jump as she felt a wand dig into her neck.

Remus spoke up from behind Rita. "You should never let yourself become distracted. I thought that was one of the first things we learnt. You've grown lax."

"And as I've been trying to tell this young man, I've no idea what either of you are going on about." Crystal went to stand up, only for Remus to prevent her from rising.

Harry smiled at her. "Now if I recall correctly, and I do, if my Dad was to tell you the true identities of Voldemort's lieutenants, he'd die."

"Everyone knows that the Malfoys were his lieutenants. They're still in Azkaban." Crystal wasn't impressed.

"So if I drop dead when I tell you who Angelus really was, then Harry will come back into the room to collect my body, apologize and leave." Remus told her. "And we all know his real identity was never revealed."

Crystal felt her mouth begin to dry up. "Be my guest."

Remus nodded at Harry before casting the Muffliato spell, so Harry's sharp hearing wouldn't pick up what was being said.

Harry also took the precaution of leaving the room and closing the door behind him before walking a little way down the corridor.

In the room, Remus kept his second wand in the woman's neck. "Angelus was Dominic Rosier."

Rita knew that she could no longer deny who she was. "Fine, so you found me."

Harry re-entered the room and Remus dropped the silencing spell he'd used. "Dad's still here, so I think we can safely assume that we were right, Rita."

"As the new head of the Auror Department, you know you won't kill me. It wouldn't exactly be an auspicious start to your new job." Rita wasn't frightened of Harry.

"You're right; I won't." Harry smiled. "But you seem to forget whose standing behind you."

Rita believed that Remus would execute her in cold blood without batting an eyelid. "It's been almost fifteen years. Why now?" Rita had fled when she'd learnt that Harry and Remus would be released from Azkaban.

"Because it's taken me this long to find you." Harry admitted. "You were very clever in covering your tracks. You may have even managed to live out your life here undetected if you hadn't made one mistake."

"What's that?" Rita thought she had covered her tracks well.

"Your animagus form." Harry smirked. "You should have known better than to use it around my wife."

"But Seville's never seen my Animagus form." Rita wondered how she could have known about it.

"But I have." Remus told her.

"You couldn't tell her about it." Rita sounded unsure of herself.

"That's where you're wrong." Remus knew that Rita didn't know everything. "You seem to have forgotten, that like all the other lieutenants, you gave Voldemort permission to tell Seville's guardian everything he or she needed to know to keep her safe, which included everyone's animagus form. As Voldemort never revoked my guardianship of her, I was free to tell her about your animagus form. With you on the loose, I couldn't be sure that you wouldn't cook up some half-baked scheme involving her to try and bring him back."

"She saw me at dinner didn't she?" Rita had found out that Seville was visiting Los Angeles for a conference that Rita was also attending, and she hadn't been able to resist talking to the young woman. Seville had happily filled her in on her marriage to Harry and the fact that she was expecting her third baby. Rita had also found out that Seville would be joining the British Minister for dinner that night. "She did." Harry looked at his nails. "You just couldn't resist getting the big scoop, could you?"

Rita never had been able to. "So what now? You just let Remus kill me in cold blood?"

"I could do and you'll be a headline in the Messenger for a few days before everyone forgets about you." Remus called her bluff; he had no intention of killing Rita. He just needed her to believe that he would. "Or you can come with us and confess to everything you've ever done."

Rita weighed up her options. She knew that she'd never be able to take Harry and Remus on together. Not wanting to die, she put down her wand. "I'll come with you."

Remus pulled out the bracelet he had with him and snapped it around her wrist. "Wise choice."

Rita touched the bracelet. "What is this?"

"Theo Nott's latest invention; it's a device which inhibits your magic while we take you in." Remus didn't tell her that once she'd confessed, it would also drain her magic to the point she'd effectively become a squib. "I need your oath that you will confess to everything you've done that is illegal, or I can happily put you out of your misery."

Rita knew she had little choice. "I swear on my life and my magic that I will confess to everything I have ever done that is illegal."

Harry then pulled out the rope that served as their international portkey. "Grab on."

The three of them arrived at the Ministry and Harry went to alert Kingsley.

Two days later, Kingsley rubbed his eyes as he closed the door behind him, and turned to face Remus and Harry. "I'd forgotten how much I hate interrogations. That was some list she had."

"My own probably wasn't much better." Remus had confessed to the part he'd played after Voldemort had been defeated.

"And you've paid for it." Kingsley reminded him. "We're going to be making a public apology about Pettigrew. Skeeter admitted to being the one who tricked him; it's her fault that the Potters were captured by Voldemort. Pettigrew was simply taken in by her."

Remus felt a little guilty. "I know that none of his family are still alive."

"It doesn't matter. I think it only fair we set the record book straight. And the interview is going to go down as public record." Kingsley had hated the closed door interview policy and one of the first things he'd done as Minister was to make the transcripts of all interviews, conducted from the day he'd taken over, public knowledge. He looked regretfully at Harry. "I'm sorry Harry but it's finally going to come out about you being the Boy Who Lived."

“What?” Harry snapped.

“She admitted to you being the Boy Who Lived and the truth about what happened in the Chamber as well as bribing Fudge for the story. When I told her that, like many others, I knew Potter had been Carus, she also came clean about everything he'd done as well. I had to pass the information onto the public recorder.” Kingsley could see that Harry was unhappy with the news. “I’m sorry but there’s nothing I can do about it.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair. “Shit, that’s all I need.”

“I thought I’d give you fair warning; it’s probably going to make the headlines tomorrow.” Kingsley then turned to Remus. “As Rita would die if she exposed you, and I wasn't going to admit that I knew who you'd been, obviously you’re off the hook.”

Harry was thankful that Remus wouldn’t be exposed to the same sort of shit he was going to be. “I think I’d better warn my family. If you’ll excuse me, Minister.”

“I’m sorry, Harry.” Kingsley apologized again before leaving.

Harry turned to Remus. “Can you warn the others, I need to get home to Seville.”

“And I need to get back to Hogwarts.” Remus hugged Harry before both men apparated out.

Chapter 78: Hermione

Due to reviewer comments which I appreciate, I have gone back and changed the last chapter a little. Hermione still dies but Harry and Sevvie's relationship is handled a little differently.

10th May 2011

"Harry, wake up." A voice permeated Harry's sleep. "Harry, you've got to wake up."

Harry opened his eyes to find himself in a large white room. At the back of the room, at the top of a set of stone steps, stood an archway across which a ragged cloth fluttered in a gentle breeze. A young woman stood a short distance away from the bottom of the steps. "Hermione, I'm awake."

"Harry, you've got to help us." Hermione held out her hand. "Come with me."

"Where are we going?" As usual, Harry felt reluctant to follow her.

Hermione didn't lower her hand or move away. "Please, Harry, you've got to help us."

"Who are us?" Harry asked the same question he always did at this point.

Another voice interrupted Harry's questioning of his dead wife. "Harry, wake up."

Harry's eyes shot open and he found Seville leaning over him. "Sevvie?"

"You were thrashing about and moaning." Seville had been woken by Harry's movements. "What were you dreaming about?"

"I don't know." Harry didn't want to tell Seville about the dream. "Go back to sleep. It's nothing to worry about."

Seville rolled over and quickly fell back to sleep.

Harry, on the other hand, didn't and he got dressed before apparating out of the house and to his office.

October 1st 2012

Severus walked outside onto the terrace and took a deep breath of the early evening air, before turning to face his wife who'd followed him out. "I just needed five minutes alone."

"You're thinking about what it would have been like if it had been Hermione getting married like this, aren't you?" Virginie knew that, like her, Severus had been thinking about his eldest daughter when his youngest had been taking her vows.

"Yes. She and Harry never got the chance to have a proper wedding or even a proper marriage." Severus sighed. "I really shouldn't be saying this but..." His voice trailed off.

Virginie finished the sentence off for him. "But you wish it could have been Harry and Hermione up there instead of Livvy and Neville don't you?"

"I've not exactly hidden my feelings about how I feel about Longbottom." Severus scowled. "Why did Livvy have to pick him? Why couldn't she have found someone more like Harry or Dominic?"

"Because she loves Neville, Sev." Virginie wrapped her arms around her husband's waist. "Just like I love you."

Severus held Virginie close and kissed her gently. "And I love you."

Virginie decided to focus Severus' attention on one of his other children. "Do you think Bas will ever settle down?" Virginie despaired of her eldest son ever doing so.

"Eventually, when he finds the right woman." Severus hoped he was right.

“When who finds the right woman?” Sebastian Snape stepped out onto the terrace and joined his parents.

“You.” Virginie wasn’t going to hide the fact that they’d been talking about him. “I was just telling your father that I’d like to see you settled down.”

“I’m in no rush.” Bas wasn’t. “I’m pretty much enjoying my life the way it is.”

“We’re well aware of that.” Severus responded acerbically.

“Papa, you know better than to believe everything you read.” Being an international quidditch star at the top of his game, Bas knew that the stories about his numerous liaisons with women weren’t all true. “Obviously, yes, some of the stories are true, but if I’d slept with as many women as the Prophet and Witch Weekly makes out that I’d done, I’d never have time for anything else.”

“We know that.” Severus reassured his son. “But it still doesn’t stop us wanting to see you settled.”

“Livvy’s only just got married, and she’s almost thirty; I’m only a year older than her.” Bas defended himself.

“But she’d been dating Neville for almost six years before today, and your brother dated Lizzie for over four years.” Virginie pointed out. Unlike his older brother, who was happy playing the field, her youngest son, Dominic, had married Lizzie Delaney almost as soon as she’d left school in June of that year. “What’s the longest one of your relationships has lasted for?”

Bas knew that he wasn’t going to win this one. “A month.”

Virginie let go of Severus and put an arm around her son’s waist. “Which is why I worry about you.”

“I know, Mama.” Bas kissed his mother’s cheek. “But please don’t; Papa’s right. I’ll settle down when I find the right woman.” Knowing

how his father felt about Neville, Bas smirked at his father. "Maybe Neville's got some cousins we don't know about."

Severus scowled at his son. "I think one Longbottom in the family is enough."

"And what's wrong with marrying a Longbottom?" Harry's sharp hearing had picked up the conversation, and he joined the group on the terrace.

Bas grinned at Harry. "Nothing when she's as pretty as Seville."

Virginie kissed Harry on the cheek. "I'm sorry that Seville couldn't make it today."

"She's done nothing but throw up all week even after being given anti-nausea potions." Harry felt guilty that his wife was suffering again during this pregnancy, as she had done during her first two. "Draco has forced her to take a couple of weeks off work while she gets over it. She's still hoping to make the conference in Los Angeles at the end of the month though." While Harry enjoyed talking to Virginie and Bas, he'd really gone looking for Severus, and he sent a brief but meaningful look to his friend.

Virginie caught the look, and she patted Harry on the arm before turning to face Bas. "If you'll excuse us, I think my son owes me a dance."

Bas dutifully followed Virginie back into the ballroom. Harry turned to Severus. "Are you upset because Livvy finally married Neville? You knew it was going to happen eventually."

Severus hadn't really liked Neville in school and he'd not warmed to him any more since then. "I just wish she'd chosen someone with more backbone."

"You're not alone." Harry admitted. "I've never really forgotten how Neville treated Sevvie, even though they made up."

Severus didn't really want to talk about Neville, and changed the subject as he began to walk down towards the lake. "Harry, can I ask you something personal?"

"You know that you can." Harry followed his former father-in-law.

"Do you still miss Hermione?" Severus still missed his daughter even though it had been more than ten years since her death.

"All the time." Harry admitted. "Even though I've grown to love my wife, there will always be a part of my heart reserved for Hermione. I sometimes look at my daughters and wonder what my children would have looked like if things had turned out differently and she hadn't died."

Severus felt comforted by Harry's words. "Thank you for telling me that. I've wanted to ask for a while but didn't want to intrude. Well that's not quite the right word but..."

"I understand Sev." Harry took a deep breath, and got onto the subject he'd gone looking for Severus to talk about. "Actually, I wanted to talk to you about the dreams I have about Hermione."

"I thought they'd tapered off." In the twilight, Severus could see that Harry's brow was furrowed.

"They did for a while but lately the dreams have been occurring more and more frequently." Harry displayed his agitation as he ran his hand through his hair.

"Do they still take place in the white room, or are they like the first one you had?" Severus followed Harry as he started to walk around the lake.

"They're nothing like that first one. I don't think I could cope if they were." Harry's first dream about Hermione had occurred the night before he'd woken her up. He dreamt that she'd told him that he could still save her and that he shouldn't give up on her. Harry had ended up in Severus' arms in floods of tears. The other dreams had started a few days later.

"Like I told you at the time, I think you felt guilty about the decision you'd made to wake her." Severus had had similar dreams himself. "Do you still think you did the right thing?"

Harry nodded. "I do, and I'm glad I had a chance to say goodbye to Hermione. But I'll always wonder if there wasn't something we could have done; that perhaps I should have fought up until the last minute and not awoken her as I did."

Severus believed in his heart that Harry had done the right thing. "Harry, you did what you thought was right at the time." He then turned the conversation back to the dreams Harry had wanted to talk to him about. "So all of these dreams take place in the white room where Hermione's asking for your help?"

Harry sat down next to Severus as they reached the bench that overlooked the lake and house. "Yes. The only thing that changes is where Hermione is standing. The first time I had the dream Hermione was standing about ten feet away from the stone steps. But each time I have the dream she's getting progressively closer and closer to the veil. In the last one she was halfway up the steps and I'm still no closer to figuring out who 'us' is or where Hermione wants me to go. I presuming into the archway but I'm still not sure."

"Do you think I could see the dreams?" Severus had never asked to see them before. "It's not as if I want to go back inside to the wedding."

"Don't you think you're being a little unfair to Livvy?" Harry knew that Severus was more than a little disappointed over his daughter's choice of husbands, but he didn't want to see his friend alienated from his daughter.

"Livvy made it perfectly clear to me that she wasn't bothered if I attended her wedding or not if I couldn't be civil to Longbottom." Severus and Livvy hadn't really gotten along since she'd announced she was dating Neville, and Severus had made his objections to Neville known to his daughter. "It's only because Virginie begged me to go that I went."

Harry winced. He'd known that Severus had little time for Neville but he hadn't realized that things had gotten that bad. "I'm sorry, Sev."

"It's okay, Harry." Severus stood up. "My daughter and I will never see eye to eye over her husband."

Harry knew that was true. "Come on then; I'll show you some of the dreams."

Fifteen minutes later Harry and Severus emerged from the pensieve. "So what do you think? Do you think it's really Hermione or just a weird repetitive dream that I'm altering a little each time?"

"I don't know." Severus watched as Harry took the memories back from the pensieve. "Before she died, Hermione spent so much time only a hair's breadth from death, that it makes me wonder if she doesn't have some sort of connection to it; hence the archway in your dream."

"I can go with that but why would she be asking for my help?" That was the part Harry didn't understand. "And what do you think I should do?"

"I think all you can do right now is to wait and see what happens." Severus didn't know what else to suggest. "Perhaps the dreams will end once Hermione goes through the veil."

"Maybe you're right." Harry felt better after confiding in Severus. "I know you don't want to go back downstairs, but I think we should."

Severus knew Harry was right. "Let's go face the enemy then."

The two men headed back down to the wedding that Severus had hoped would never happen.

1st May 2028

Severus passed Harry a glass of scotch. "I had a feeling you wouldn't go."

Harry had refused to attend the 30th year anniversary of Voldemort's death. "I couldn't see the point. I'm no hero. I wasn't even really there."

"Have you decided what you're going to do?" Severus leant back against his chair.

"It's been a tough decision." Harry sighed.

"You're going to do it, aren't you?" Severus knew that Harry had been thinking about it for some time.

"Yes. It finally feels the right thing to do." Harry swirled the scotch around the glass.

"When are you going to tell Seville and the children?" Severus knew that Seville would be heartbroken when Harry told her what he'd got planned.

"I'm not." Harry ran his hand through his hair. "How do you tell someone that because of the dreams I've had about my dead wife I'm going to step into something you and Narcy fought so hard to keep me out of?"

Severus knew Harry had a point. "It's true it would be hard but do you really think it's fair to do this to Seville without telling her?"

"Not really but then again life hasn't exactly been fair to me." Harry knew that compared to his former counterpart, he'd had a pretty good life but it still hadn't been what he'd hoped for. "Nic's agreed to tell her there was an accident; I really can't tell her the truth. Only you, Nic, Peri and Orion will know that. Orion has agreed to step in and take my place as head of the Auror Division once I'm gone."

"I can't believe Orion simply agreed to it." Severus knew what a straight arrow Orion was.

"He wouldn't until I asked him to put himself in my shoes and imagine that Sophia was Hermione." Harry had known that Orion would

support him when he'd explained how he felt. "I'm frightened if I don't do it now then I'll never be able to do it. Hermione's almost gone from the dreams; there's now only her fingertips left outstretched. I feel if I let her go then my chance will have gone as well."

"Your chance to do what, Harry?" Severus had no idea what Harry meant.

"I don't know, Sev." Harry was at a loss to explain his feelings.

"It's not going to be the same without you." Severus admitted.

"Sev, I want you to know that ever since Dad died... Hell, even before that, you've been more than a friend to me." Harry and his family had been stunned when Remus had died suddenly of a heart attack a few years earlier.

Severus could feel his throat closing at Harry's words, and he coughed to clear it. "Harry, you mean a lot to me and I don't want you to do it but if you decide to go through with it, I'll support you."

"Thank you." Harry looked down into his glass. "I feel like a Class A selfish bastard for doing this, but I know that Robert and Jennifer will take care of Seville if I do. Ken's happily settled with Nic Shackbolt and the other girls won't be too far behind her. In my Will I've asked Robert to take care of them if they need help."

"What about your investments?" Severus, having made some with Harry, knew that they were quite extensive.

"Most of them will go to Robert as the Potter heir but there's a few I don't think should." Harry had thought long and hard about what to do with them. "I've decided to give George and Katie's four children the shares I own in WWW."

"What about the shares in NZ Industries?" Severus had invested quite a bit himself, and he knew that his shares were now worth a great deal more than he'd paid for them.

"I'm going to leave them to David Nott and Matthew Zabini." Harry felt it was only fair. "If it hadn't have been for their parents' hard work, the shares certainly wouldn't be worth what they are today." Harry stood up and walked over to the fireplace, and closed his eyes for a moment as he thought about his precious daughters. "Will you keep an eye on the girls for me?"

Severus felt maudlin having such a conversation. "I will but I'm sure that Robert will look after them, and I know Bas will."

Harry smiled when he thought about Severus' eldest son. "Speaking of Bas, I think we've got a visitor."

Severus had heard the sound too, and got to his feet to open the door to his study to find his granddaughter standing there. "Hello, Mione."

"Gwanpa, pick up." Mione Snape held out her arms to her grandfather who obligingly lifted her into them.

Chloe came running around the corner. "I'm sorry Severus; she got away from me when I was feeding Remie."

"It's quite alright." Severus and Virginie had been thrilled when six years earlier, Bas had finally quit quidditch to take up the flying instructor's position at Hogwarts, where he and Chloe had surprised everyone by falling in love and eloping after just two months. Severus and Virginie had been even more delighted when the couple had announced that Chloe was expecting a baby girl who they were going to name after the sister that Bas had adored.

Harry kissed his sister on the cheek. "You're looking well, Chloe."

"You too, Harry." Chloe took her wriggling daughter off Severus, before walking away and calling over her shoulder. "I'll see you at the weekend."

Severus closed the door and turned back to Harry. "She won't, will she?"

Harry shook his head. "No."

Severus pulled Harry into his arms. "I'm going to miss you."

Harry could feel tears welling up as he let Severus enfold him in a hug. "I'm going to miss you too."

Severus pulled away. "I hope you find what you're looking for."

"So do I." Harry stepped into the hallway and prepared to apparate away.

"Goodbye, my son." Severus wanted his final words to Harry to convey how much he cared about Harry.

At Severus' words, Harry hesitated before pulling Severus into one final hug. "I love you."

"I love you as well." Severus kissed Harry on the top of his head and let him go.

Harry then stepped back and apparated away.

There's just a short epilogue left where we return back to 1998.

Chapter 79: Epilogue

1st May 1998

Voldemort knew what Harry was planning from the moment he cannoned into him. Voldemort rarely felt frightened, but now he was hit by fear unlike anything he'd ever known. He could do nothing as Harry looked at him and uttered the words that he knew were going to be the last he'd ever hear. "I am the Boy Who Lived."

As Voldemort entered the archway, his arm wrapped around Harry's neck, he tried to scream out but couldn't make a noise. All of a sudden, they came to a halt. Even though they'd stopped, Voldemort could still feel something trying to pull him into the dark void that now surrounded him, and he tightened his grip on Harry's neck. His lifeline came to an abrupt end as pain lanced through his arm and he watched as Harry vanished and he was sucked into the void; being tumbled head over heels as he hurtled backwards.

Voldemort wondered if he'd spend eternity that way but the motion ceased as he was spat out of the darkness and onto a hard surface. As he rolled over and onto his feet, the pain in what was left of his arm reminded Voldemort of what Orion had done to him. Voldemort knew that only one knife could have cut through his arm like that, and that there was no magical way of stopping the bleeding. Unless he wanted to die, he knew that he'd have to use a Muggle method to save himself. After first casting a numbing spell, Voldemort cauterized the wound, his stomach heaving at the smell of burning flesh. Once he'd dealt with his most imminent problem, he looked around.

He was surprised to find himself standing in what appeared to be the same Death Chamber he'd left from; only now it was devoid of anyone. Behind him the veil fluttered gently as if in a breeze. Suddenly the rest of his arm shot out of the veil to lie at his feet. Even though he was shocked by the sight of the arm, Voldemort decided to remove the one thing of any value to him from it. With a little difficulty, he slid the ring housing the resurrection stone off the finger that held it before destroying the arm. He knew that he'd never be able to reattach it. Just as he finished destroying it, Voldemort looked up as a man opened the door to the room and called out to him to stop.

Not sure of how long he'd been lost inside the void of the archway, and not wanting to tackle anyone while he was at such a disadvantage, Voldemort apparated out of the room. The man who'd opened the door turned around to his dark-haired commander. "The alarms were right about the room being breached. There was a man in here, Sir. Unfortunately he ignored my warning and apparated out."

"Did you recognize him?" The head of Auror Division asked.

The man shook his head. "No, Sir."

"Keep this room under surveillance. I want to know if anything or anyone tries to get in again." The man knew that no-one had ever been able to figure out what the archway was. Only certain individuals in the Ministry even knew it existed; the door to the room where it resided always being kept locked. The man wondered how the intruder had known that the room even existed, let alone managed to get inside it.

The first man knew he'd have to assign a team to stand guard outside the main door. "Is there anything else I can do, Sir?"

"No thank you." Sirius Black closed the door and left to file a report.